

# Community Involvement in Planning and Management for Outdoor Recreation in New Zealand Protected Areas

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**Abstract**—Managing New Zealand’s protected natural and historic heritage falls largely on the Department of Conservation (DOC), which manages close to a third of the country’s land area and increasing proportions of the coastal/marine setting. Providing public access to this shared heritage through a range of recreation opportunities is a key management outcome for DOC. This allows New Zealanders to derive beneficial outcomes from the protected lands and places, and become more connected to their conservation. Management of outdoor recreation includes significant roles for the public, based on a long tradition of community involvement and interest in providing outdoor recreation opportunities. This involvement includes participation in planning the recreation opportunities to be provided, and in maintaining the facilities that support those opportunities. This paper explores two recent examples of community consultation in park and protected-area management. First, the community role in a major national conservation policy review is explored, with particular reference to directions for outdoor recreation provision. Then a recent national process of public consultation on determining the balance of recreation opportunities across the country is explored.

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## Introduction

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Parks are a social construct and their management is fundamentally a social process. “Parks are political manifestations of a society’s interest in protecting its natural and cultural heritage. To a great extent then, planning for the future of these parks, and solving the challenges confronting them is a political process as well” (Eagles and McCool 2002: 148). This requires engagement with the public and the various “communities”<sup>1</sup> therein to ensure that the values being managed on their behalf by park management agencies truly reflect their wants and needs. The ongoing management of wildlife, weeds and pests, poaching, extractive uses, habitat loss, minimizing tourism and recreational impacts (as well as researching and monitoring in relation to these issues), are all financially demanding and often politically contentious. Resources committed to protected

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area management are seldom enough, and conservation is typically not a high priority for most government's funding of “public good” services. This is especially so in those places where provision of basic public services is a greater challenge, or demands for other resource uses are high. Enhancing the relationship between the public and their parks is one major step towards guaranteeing the continuance of protected areas (Booth 1986). Or as put in the well known saying . . . *“Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me and I understand.”* The working assumption for park managers here is that community involvement is good—that where it demonstrably influences a change in management, public consultation can enhance wider understanding of conservation goals, and that this may ultimately contribute to greater public support and resource allocation for management in these protected areas. This paper explores active community involvement in park and protected area management by the Department of Conservation (DOC) by summarizing some historical developments, describing the scope of community involvement in DOC’s management role, and then summarizing two recent examples of community involvement in key national management and policy processes for providing outdoor recreation opportunities.

## Some History of Community Involvement in Outdoor Recreation Facilities

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To set the scene for understanding current community involvement in New Zealand park recreation management, it is useful to have a brief historical perspective. New Zealand outdoor recreationists have a long history of active involvement in the visitor facilities network (Young 2004). Clubs with an outdoor recreation focus formed early in New Zealand’s contemporary history, with common titles such as tramping clubs (for example, hikers, overnight walkers), alpine clubs (climbers) and deerstalkers (deer hunters). An early example was the New Zealand Alpine Club, which was established in 1891 based on the British Alpine Club model (Burrell 1981). The first ‘tramping club’ in New Zealand, the Tararua Tramping Club, was established in 1919, and, with 650 members, is currently the largest of all the tramping

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<sup>1</sup> “Communities” in this paper refers to communities of interest, which are highly variable in definition according to the situation or topic at issue. In this case, the interest area is management of conservation areas and visitor use of those areas.

clubs (FMC 2005). These interest groups became much more common in the post-World War II economic and social boom (Devlin 1995). Ninety tramping and alpine clubs now exist across the country, affiliated together within the Federated Mountains Clubs (FMC). This national group was established in 1931 because, at that time, the Government establishment of parks and promoting access was seen to be unplanned and unregulated, and a united public lobby group was considered necessary (Burrell 1981). True to its origins, the FMC has been providing vigorous public advocacy on protected area management until the present day. In addition, there are currently 50 branches of the NZ Deerstalkers Association (established 1937) with its overarching national executive also active in advocating its members' interests.

Many of the individual clubs have developed tracks and built huts as part of their club activities over the years. Indeed, for many members it is still a matter of some significance and pride that their club was responsible for the construction of particular huts and tracks. Quigg (1993) describes several ways by which people relate to backcountry huts: as a practical shelter, as an incentive to visit a location, as a style of habitation that is enjoyed in the backcountry setting but which would not be tolerated in a modern urban setting, and as a valued relic of past generations and culture. Huts could be considered a central part of how the NZ outdoor recreation community identifies itself, and to this day are often the focus of debate over facility decision-making. At the time the first tramping clubs were exploring New Zealand's mountain ranges, the need for huts and marked tracks was made clear by the not uncommon loss of life in exposed locations due to sudden changes in weather conditions (McLean 1994). It would not be out of place to state that the hut and track network represents the backbone of New Zealand's outdoor recreation opportunity in protected areas.

There has been a dynamic nature to both the private and public commitment to the provision and use of this network over time. Some facilities established by community groups were absorbed into the overall facility network managed by government departments, notably as the need increased to employ hunters to control introduced deer in forests. In the same period, some government huts and tracks no longer being used by these government hunters were sometimes adopted by clubs, as a useful compromise to building their own. In some cases the community group support withered and as a result, many early huts were neglected and eventually destroyed by nature (McLean 1994; Wright 1986). However, in other cases many groups retained strong membership, which has enabled them to remain largely responsible for managing their own huts or those hut and tracks adopted into recreation from other management purposes. Notable in this respect are a number of alpine huts built by alpine clubs to support climbing at premier peaks. When such huts required replacing, the club tended to become involved in planning a new building. This still applies today and, as an example, the Tararua Aorangi Huts Committee, a coalition of 16 tramping clubs and deerstalker branches, is active in working with DOC to coordinate the ongoing management and replacement of the local huts network in its region.

In more recent years, the management of these hut and track networks has become more stable and consistent. For much of the 20th century, two government agencies were predominantly responsible for managing much of the

undeveloped lands where facilities such as huts and tracks were being built. The Department of Lands and Survey Department was responsible for national parks, and the NZ Forest Service was charged with other lands held for forestry, water catchment protection or other uses yet to be determined. In these lands, they had inherited the uncoordinated variety of huts, tracks and other facilities created by diverse groups for different reasons described above. Based on these inherited facilities, and in response to their own needs and objectives, both agencies developed and managed wider infrastructure networks for visitors, including road-end picnic areas with campgrounds, as well as tracks and huts of varying standards. Many of the inherited huts and tracks were created for highly localized and specific recreation needs by communities, clubs, and individuals. When these government agencies were themselves combined into the new Department of Conservation (DOC) in 1987, the new agency took on the obligations resulting from all this relatively ad-hoc facility development, including the need to ensure a network of safe and sustainable facilities. With huts continuing to fulfill all of the practical, recreational and identity purposes described, there remains strong public interest in the hut and track network. The policy and management consultation processes reported in this paper comprise an important part of the DOC's initiatives to meet these obligations more sustainably into the future.

## Community Involvement and the Department of Conservation

To understand the importance the Department of Conservation accords to the community involvement and consultation component of its work, it is important to know that the DOC has a strong mandate for advocating conservation through encouraging community involvement in conservation and recreation. Key legislation requires the DOC to "... advocate the conservation of natural and historic resources" and "... promote the benefits to present and future generations of the conservation of natural and historic resources."<sup>2</sup> Based on this mandate, encouraging community involvement in protected area management to enhance cumulative benefits to conservation has been reflected in the DOC's strategic planning documents. The strategic conservation outcomes underpinning its Statement of Intent (DOC 2005a)<sup>3</sup> are simply:

- **Protection**—New Zealand's natural and historic heritage is protected and restored.
- **Appreciation**—People enjoy and benefit from New Zealand's natural and historic heritage and are connected with conservation (emphasis added).

A key component of the Appreciation Outcome is that people are to be increasingly connected with conservation. The DOC has drawn on reviews of community involvement in its management (CRESA 1998; DOC 1998; Fitzgerald

<sup>2</sup> Sections 6(b) and 6(c) of the Conservation Act (1987).

<sup>3</sup> The Statement of Intent, Conservation with Communities Strategy, and other strategic information can be viewed on the DOC webpage [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz).

1999; Forgie and others 2001; Ringer and O'Brien 1997) to consolidate best practice knowledge into a specific "Conservation with Communities Strategy" (DOC 2003a). This provides a comprehensive guide for determining the direction of future initiatives towards achieving the appreciation outcome (fig. 1), and has been subsequently supported by specific publications on various component processes, tools and methods (for example, DOC 2003b; Wilson 2005).

The strategy is based on two parts: the first focuses on How We Work, emphasizing the underlying organizational culture, skills and capability to engage with communities; the second explores What We do, outlining the range of ways through which the department actually engages with

communities, and how the effectiveness of this engagement can be improved. A commitment to actively involve communities and to facilitate ways to share conservation work with them through a range of opportunities is clear from figure 1. More specifically under theme 2.1, Sharing Conservation Work, the Subtheme 2.1.1 Opportunities for Participation, states that the DOC will "Provide, and help others provide, a range of opportunities to be involved in conservation work and to contribute to decision-making." There is a range of participation types that will be appropriate for different situations, and this spectrum is illustrated in figure 2. The range of the DOC management contexts in which such community involvement can occur are summarized in figure 3.

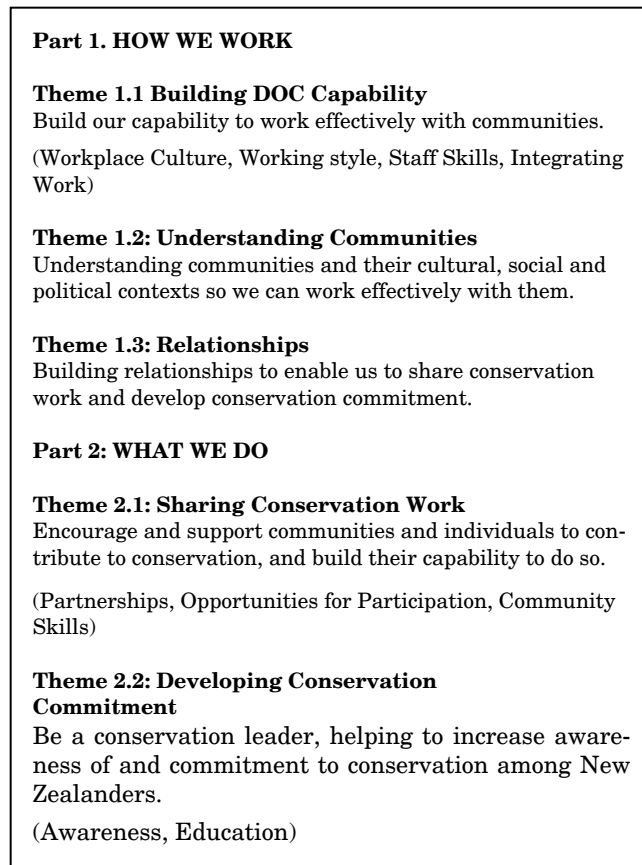


Figure 1—Conservation with Communities Strategy.

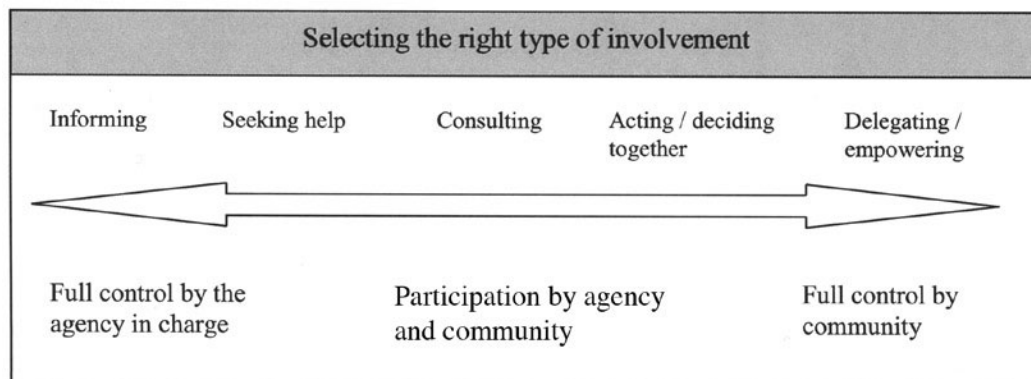
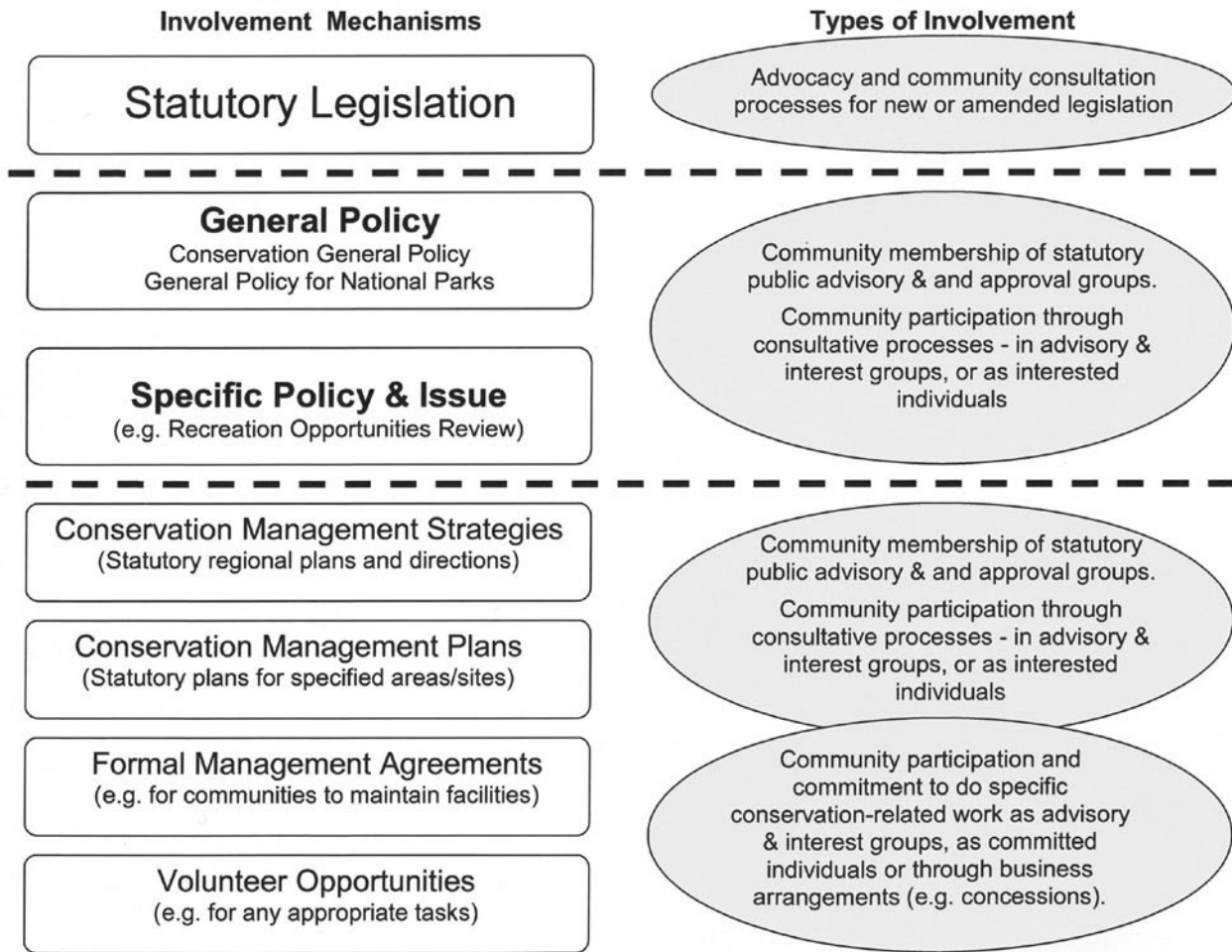


Figure 2—The spectrum of community participation (DOC 2003b, adapted from Arnstein 1969).



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Figure 3—Community participation opportunities in the DOC management processes.

Typically New Zealanders’ general wants and needs for conservation are expressed through the government legislation that guides the work of park management agencies. Communities have opportunities to participate in these legislative processes. Regional and local level management planning involves different levels of detail, and provides different opportunities and challenges for community involvement. The outcomes are expressed through strategic policy, the region-specific Conservation Management Strategies, and the park-specific Conservation Management Plans. Within all this are a variety of opportunities to contribute directly to conservation work.

Voluntary effort covers a wide range of conservation activities from care of coastal and river environments, protecting historic sites, pest monitoring and control, weed eradication, ecological restoration, and work with endangered species, as well as involvement in recreation opportunity and facility initiatives. The role of voluntary work can be significant across all of these different tasks. For example, when a recent methodology used to calculate the value of voluntary effort across 10 nationwide voluntary agencies (NZFVVO 2004) was subsequently applied to the DOC related voluntary work, it was estimated that during 12 months of 2003/04, this voluntary contribution was equivalent to 63 fulltime

staff. This equated to over 5 percent of the permanent ranger staff capacity (Wright, personal communication). In the last year, the DOC provided opportunities for hundreds of volunteers and more than 31,000 workday equivalents were contributed by individuals or groups. There are estimated to be over 3,000 community groups actively involved with ecological restoration projects on public and private land. In addition, 260 partnerships are in operation, most of which are with community-based voluntary groups. And going beyond fostering simple involvement in doing work, the DOC has now also undertaken more than 100 initiatives to actively build the conservation skills and knowledge of over 4,000 regular participants in volunteer activities (DOC 2005b).

The value of such community involvement is increasingly being recognized by the department, including the role of training to enhance relevant community skills. In the last 5 years the DOC has started including information about community contributions to management, community training programs, and related communication initiatives as performance measures in its annual reports to Government. This represents a fundamental recognition that this community involvement can enhance the sense of “outcome ownership” fostered among participants, increase flow-on advocacy effects to others, and result in even greater community support for conservation.

Matching the importance increasingly associated with the role of active voluntary work in supporting conservation management work, the role of active and engaging public consultation has also become more significant in recent times. In the sections below, the results of two national and highly strategic consultative processes are described—the General Policy Review and the Recreation Opportunity Review—(fig. 3). Both relate to setting the long-term strategic policy and planning directions that guide key management programs and decisions. Both processes created long-term statements of the communities' conservation priorities, which also underpin the development and ongoing review of the critical Conservation Management Strategies (CMS's)<sup>4</sup> (fig. 3). These processes are discussed here in order to illustrate some of the possibly unique ways in which New Zealand has developed significant community involvement in its management of parks and protected areas.

## General Policy Review

General Policy is the highest level of statutory policy for directing conservation management in New Zealand and provides the fundamental interpretations of New Zealand's key conservation legislation<sup>5</sup>. It has recently been reviewed and enhanced, and is included here as an example of statutory and formalized community involvement at the highest levels of conservation decision-making (fig. 3). As stated by the DOC's Director General in 2004:

When confirmed, our General Policy will act as a guide for developing our Conservation Management Strategies and in the way that current policies are interpreted and implemented. I expect it will have a significant bearing on many aspects of our departmental work for many years to come. Practically speaking, this is the most significant development in conservation policy since the passing of the Conservation Act (Hugh Logan, Director General of DOC, March 2004).

This overarching General Policy comprises two overlapping but distinct components: (1) the General Policy for National Parks, which was established in 1983 under the National Parks Act (1980); and (2) the Conservation General Policy, which was developed much later (2003-2005) to cover those conservation lands not managed as national parks. A combined consultative process was set up to review the existing General Policy for National Parks and undertake the consultation required to establish the new Conservation General Policy. Both General Policy components were approved in late 2005 (DOC 2005c,d) after an extensive consultation process. This featured a nationally coordinated and consistent public notification program, which consisted of: (1) detailing the release of the draft policies, (2) holding hearings on more substantive issues as required, (3) submission receipt and processing, and (4) independent analysis and reporting of

<sup>4</sup> These 10-year strategic plans are a statutory requirement for each of DOC's 13 regional management areas (Conservancies) and require public consultation on all conservation management outcomes, including the nature of the various recreation services, facilities and opportunities to be provided.

<sup>5</sup> Key conservation legislation for the Conservation General Policy: Conservation Act 1987, Wildlife Act 1953, Marine Reserves Act 1971, Reserves Act 1977, Wild Animal Control Act 1977, Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978a; and for the General Policy for National Parks, the National Parks Act 1980.

the content. While its national scale and significant policy context was notable, this process was otherwise a largely conventional public consultation approach.

However, a notable feature was the involvement of the New Zealand Conservation Authority (NZCA)—an independent statutory body representing community interests at a national level—in the approval process for these Policies. The NZCA has a responsibility for contributing to the development, approval and implementation of general policy, conservation management strategies, and conservation management plans (fig. 3) that represent the fundamental strategic directions for the DOC. The activities of the NZCA and conservation boards<sup>6</sup> reflect a long-term expectation of formalized public involvement in conservation management (Young 2004) at a level that may not be common elsewhere.

The resulting new General Policies (DOC 2005c,d) largely reflected a public endorsement of most existing approaches to conservation management being taken by the DOC. A notable exception related to mountain biking access. Of a total of 1,644 public submissions, 69 percent (1,133) represented a desire for some provision being made for mountain-biking access to tracks in national parks, an activity previously prohibited in national parks except on designated roads. This change in policy was significant because it illustrated the evolution of regulations as society's interests in recreation activities change. The mountain biking example was interesting because of the lessons they learned about achieving successful advocacy. For the mountain bike community this outcome was the result of a long campaign beginning in 1996, when the designation of the new Kahurangi National Park resulted in loss of access to the renowned Heaphy track. After several unsuccessful attempts, their eventual success in having the more bike-friendly General Policy for National Parks approved in 2005 was attributed by mountain biking representatives to a combination of patience, persistence, consistency, strategy, collaborations, and time (Wyn-Williams, personal communication) (fig. 4). Consultation is an opportunity for change, but change will only result when the engagement is meaningful and occurs at the right time and place. In this case, the mountain biking community used the unique opportunity represented by this strategic consultation process to their benefit.

## Recreation Opportunities Review

When the DOC was established, it inherited a hut track and facility system that was financially unsustainable. Clarity and direction was needed to identify priorities for allocating the limited resources. What would the optimum facility network look like? The need for the Recreation Opportunity Review (ROR) came from fundamental issues of facility governance, safety, suitability, and sustainability. The ROR has been the largest consultation process ever carried out on outdoor recreation facilities in New Zealand's protected natural areas. In it, the DOC's extensive visitor

<sup>6</sup> While the NZCA is an independent national body established by statute to represent the national public interest in the work of DOC and conservation in general, the 14 Conservation Boards represent a regionally defined level with similar mandates and fulfilling similar functions in a more localized regional context.

- **Timing**—We put ourselves in position to be at the right place at the right time, by being prepared and staying in touch with stakeholder, manager and statutory timetables and processes.
- **Patience/Coming of Age**—The Heaphy campaign started 10 years before and we experienced setbacks on past attempts to change policy. We showed tenacity by hanging in there until our perspective became more understood, fears diminished, and through succession over time our advocates became increasingly part of the decision-making establishment.
- **Strength of Argument**—Using the weight of well-analyzed research, observation and anecdotal experience to back the case, and emphasizing the benefits from allowing the change.
- **Conservation Authority Membership**—Getting to know the NZCA system, roles, responsibilities and members, engaging directly with them on a personal level, finding common ground, supporting those who supported our objectives.
- **Resources and People**—Having enthusiastic people who know the consultative processes, agencies and stakeholders—and the factors driving them, and also people who can also analyze, synthesize and present good submission material.
- **Dialogue with Stakeholders**—Contacting everyone both for and against our proposals, engaging with them to identify common ground, being open to what they can teach us, and discussing contentious issues to overcome prejudices, resolve differences or to just agree to disagree.
- **Submissions in Quantity and Quality**—Most of the 1,100 mountain bike submissions were form letters. But as well as the substantial main submission made, some others were from strategic organizations, including some Conservation Boards, District and City Councils, national recreation associations, Tramping and Climbing representative associations, and individual tramping clubs.
- **Federated Mountain Clubs (FMC) Accord**—Developing a formal accord with FMC that recognized areas of commonality, including mountain bike access to National Parks. FMC represents most of the country's tramping clubs, including the increasing numbers who are mountain bikers, and also some mountain bike clubs which have joined FMC.

**Figure 4**—Successful advocacy in general policy review—an example from the mountain biking community.

facility infrastructure<sup>7</sup> was reviewed in site-specific detail by those members of the public interested in its future.

**The ROR Process.** The ROR was established to better align the existing network of recreation facilities with the range of recreation opportunities desired by users. This exercise was subject to existing conservation objectives within the context of known budget projections. The ROR was preceded by an inventory and review of the existing facility network. Government made a decision to retain the existing range of recreation opportunities, with funding sufficient to maintain “most, but not all” of the facility network currently

<sup>7</sup> This visitor facilities network includes 1,000 huts, 300 campsites, 12,500 km/7,767 miles walking and overnight hiking tracks, 1,600 toilets, 90 wharves, 14,000 bridges and boardwalks, 390 picnic and other amenity areas, 80 visitor centers and information outlets, and many information and direction signs.

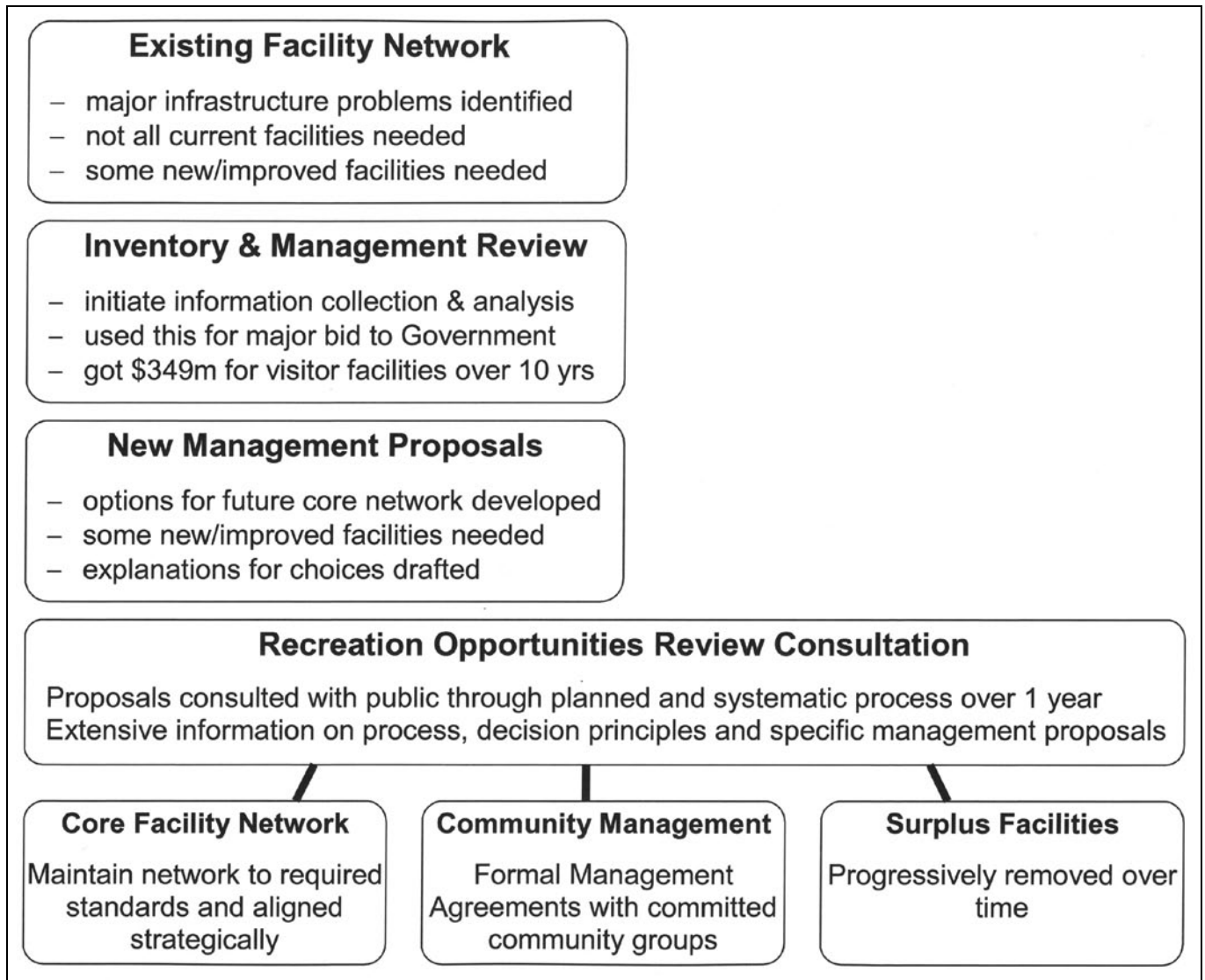
available, but accepting that some new facilities were needed (DOC 2003c). All facilities had to be managed to appropriate service standards of construction, maintenance, and safety. Some new facilities would be needed to meet new or strategic needs, and some facilities would need to be reclassified and managed to a lower standard or removed altogether (fig. 5). The aim of the ROR process was to assist the DOC to decide, in consultation with the community, which overall combination of visitor facilities would best meet public needs to the level of guaranteed funding.

The ROR process was developed using a national reference team, which included representatives of key outdoor recreation and tourism interest groups. This enabled early discussion regarding issues of concern about process and style, and a commitment to resolving any issues that might otherwise have negatively affected progress. Such issues included how long the process should take, the decision-making steps to be followed, and what initiatives to take to involve the public of New Zealand in the process. A national public resource document was compiled—“Toward a better network of visitor facilities” (DOC 2003c)—which included a comprehensive background of the process, the consultation principles on which it was operating, the management principles guiding the DOC’s decision-making, and detailed the ways in which people could be involved.

While nationally coordinated with standard process guidelines, the consultation process itself was carried out concurrently by each of the DOC’s 13 Conservancies, who developed specific management proposals for each of the identified visitor facilities in their regions. The DOC has made a commitment to provide a core network of facilities across the country, but community groups were directly encouraged to become involved in maintaining non-core facilities if they specifically valued them (fig. 5). Each of the 1,220 management proposals was to either create, maintain, improve, reduce, remove, or find some community support for a specific visitor facility. Overall the proposals tended to emphasize some reduction in facilities in the backcountry and remote locations, based on the department’s view that there was an existing high level of facility provision there, and enhancing options in frontcountry areas. The changes included proposed reductions in huts from 991 to 781, and of total track length from 12,800 km/7,954 miles to 12,000 km/7,456 miles.

These management proposals were presented online and in published proposal documents. Both included an overall vision for the recreation opportunities in the conservancy, the rationale used to make the management proposals, lists of proposed changes to specific facilities, and explanations for each of the specific proposals. The public and recreation groups were invited to make submissions on the proposed changes in writing or online. Local meetings and workshops were held to introduce the process, and later to address issues that were deemed to warrant specific attention. Almost 1,500 individual submissions were received, many commenting on more than one of the proposed changes presented for consultation. In total, responses to the specific facility proposals totaled around 8,600 (DOC 2004). Without getting into site-specific examples, the overall responses emphasized the following general themes:

- A strong lobby for traditional backcountry tramping opportunities, representing a desire to retain the essential



**Figure 5**—Structure and context of the Recreation Opportunities Review.

undeveloped character of the backcountry, and to retain many of the small, low-use backcountry huts;

- Support for community management of desired facilities that fell outside of the DOC’s proposed core network;
- Indication that some visitor types are not well catered to, particularly disabled visitors and those wanting to use 4-wheel drive vehicles;
- Some expectation that the DOC will develop some tourist-oriented facilities to support local community economies; and
- Clear indication that some local communities are very attached to their recreation opportunities, irrespective of national or strategic value to the core network.

In response to these submissions, meetings, and workshops, the DOC’s overall management directions from this process were that:

- The DOC will now retain more huts as core facilities than originally proposed;

- The DOC will manage more tracks than it currently does. Some tracks will be phased out, but some new strategic links will be constructed;
- Some of the easily accessible huts close to roadends that were proposed for removal will now be retained for use by less able visitors and family groups;
- Facility service standards will generally be kept at more basic levels where possible; and
- The DOC remains supportive of the concept of community involvement in facility maintenance where suitable sustainable arrangement can be made.

The make-up of the core facility network proved to be particularly contentious with the recreating public who engaged in the consultation process. This suggests that it will be important to continue to focus public attention on any proposed changes to facilities as other planning exercises are undertaken, such as in forthcoming reviews of Conservation Management Strategies and Conservation Management Plans (refer to fig. 5).

**Community Management of Facilities.** Not all facilities could be retained by the DOC within the funding allocation. However, community groups, such as outdoor recreation clubs, could contribute to maintaining public visitor facilities. Groups expressing a strong desire to see particular low priority facilities retained were encouraged to volunteer to take on this responsibility, or to formalize existing commitments. Many submissions supported this concept, although these varied from simple acknowledgement that volunteers could take on this role, to groups making offers in relation to specific facilities. Most of these offers related to a total of 87 huts (out of a total of 991 huts), as well as offers to maintain 390 km/242 miles of track (out of a total of 12,800 km/7,954 miles). Their involvement does not end there, however, as interested user groups will retain an opportunity at any time to revisit their interest in actively maintaining some of the non-core facilities, by reviewing existing agreements, or by discussing new arrangements with the DOC. The consequences of ceasing to provide a contribution would mean the phasing out of the facility.

The concept of community involvement in facility management had been mooted prior to the consultation. Indeed, as noted, outdoor recreation clubs already have a long history of association with backcountry facilities. At the time of the ROR process, the DOC already had a standard process to allow community group proposals to be assessed (DOC 1998). The process steps include the DOC assessing if such an approach would be likely to succeed, and if so, a formal agreement could then be established between the DOC and each of the groups involved. Such an agreement outlines the obligations being accepted by both parties, which include adherence to standard procedures for health and safety for themselves and the public, the required standards to which the facility must be managed, and timeframes for that commitment.

As a result of the consultation, decisions about community management proposals increased the length of track to be managed by communities by 125 km/78 miles, and the number of huts by three. Since the release of the decisions for huts (which include 79 removals and a further 104 to be phased out over time), more interest in taking on a management role has been expressed by community groups. As a result, there are discussions occurring between the DOC and group representatives to progress formal agreements. It is also worth noting that the involvement of and benefits to groups are not confined to the maintenance of the facilities themselves, but include relationship building with communities involved, and through the example set that might encourage other groups and managers to engage in this sort of partnership.

An evaluation was undertaken of groups who took part in the consultation process and their attitudes towards the consultation process. After the launch of the consultation, 52 percent of 90 clubs who were affiliated with the Federated Mountain Clubs responded to a short questionnaire and reported a generally supportive view of what the DOC was seeking to achieve and how this was being done. Most had made submissions as part of the process. After the process had been completed and decisions published, 37 percent responded to another questionnaire and indicated a very favorable attitude towards the process, with 80 percent of respondents believing their submissions had been fully

or in part accommodated in the final decisions. The lower response rate at the finish of the process was influenced by the timing of the request for feedback, which was sent out not long before the summer holiday break when clubs tend to be preoccupied with planning and then undertaking trips.

The DOC staff were also canvassed for their perspective on the consultation process. There was a strong opinion that the engagement, which included stakeholder meetings, submission analysis and development of management responses, had established and strengthened relationships between the department and the community. Managers felt that they were more familiar with their stakeholders' views, and were more comfortable in dealing with them because of the exchanges that had occurred. Lessons learned included (1) the need to target proposals to the relevant community of interest more specifically to ensure representative feedback across the range of visitor groups; (2) that consultation is time-consuming, so the DOC and community groups need to plan for the time required for completing tasks; (3) that evaluation methods need to be more engaging of all participants to boost response rates; and (4) that decision-making in this context is not by formula, but by negotiation around key principles of seeking common good outcomes and aligning with legislative intent.

This last point is significant to any consultation process. It is typical for public agencies to consult over the general intent of ongoing management direction, and then, without further consultation, to manage the detail using criteria to guide actions within the broader policy context. Public engagement in these New Zealand examples demonstrated a clear focus on detail from communities here, and success at consultation was achieved through compromise over individual decisions rather than over the principles themselves.

## Conclusion

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This paper has described two recent examples of the DOC involving the community in strategic management decision-making and policy setting. No matter the title used (national park, reserve, backcountry, wilderness), the communities of interest for any of these protected areas will have their own point of focus and hold their own opinions as to how their interest should be managed. Good management depends on the political and active support of the public. Recreation activity in the backcountry of New Zealand has a contemporary history almost as long as the history of European settlement itself. The public has been heavily involved in the development of the infrastructure that enables backcountry recreation opportunities, in the past and today. This has been achieved through formal groups and unassociated individuals undertaking tasks in pursuit of their own or collective goals. Outdoor recreation groups have been significant in helping shape the facility network that exists today, and they continue to take an active interest in the strategic direction of the DOC as more coordinated and sustainable priorities are being decided to match available funding into the future.

Recent public consultation processes have illuminated the key issues and opinions held in relation to recreation opportunities in the large tracts of wildlands that provide New Zealand's backcountry, remote, and wilderness experiences. The divergences and convergences of views expressed

in these processes reflect differing value sets that managers must accommodate in some way, a balancing act that is seldom completely harmonious. The processes of facilitating community consultation, as demonstrated here, represent a good way of identifying conflict issues and working toward solutions. The results of both of these exercises in consultation demonstrate that there is active and constructive community participation in the development of policy and management for New Zealand's conservation lands. This participation builds on the long history of public involvement in the provision of backcountry facilities. That involvement influenced the DOC as the administering agency to undertake consultation as part of its management practices, and has resulted in changes that reflect the preferences of those members of the public who engaged in the processes.

The purposeful decision taken by the DOC to engage in consultation on policy and management actions has established a community participation approach that is more empowering than has been the pattern in the past, because the requirement for that consultation is now both formalized in statute and promoted outside of legislative requirements. Political and advocacy activity is now occurring within a wider context of public engagement in conservation management, which is fundamentally supported by the DOC strategic policy. This strategy acknowledges the potential gains that can be achieved through greater community knowledge of, and involvement in, conservation.

The events reported in this paper support such an approach, and hopefully it will continue to be proven worthwhile in the future. Building on these successes, continuing and enhancing public engagement in decision-making will no doubt be important when tackling the many significant challenges faced in conservation management today.

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