



Federated Mountain Clubs of NZ

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Whirinaki Submissions,
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Dear Sir/Madam

FMC Submission regarding the Draft Whirinaki Te Pua-a-Tāne Conservation Park Management Plan

Federated Mountain Clubs represents the interests of our 20,000 members who tramp, hunt, cycle and climb in the New Zealand backcountry, and the wider outdoors community. We welcome and are thankful for the opportunity to make a submission on this draft plan.

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General Comments

FMC acknowledges Ngāti Whare as the reaffirmed kaitiaki of Whirinaki Te Pua-a-Tāne Conservation Park. We wish them all the best. Their description of the ngahere as “te Wao Nui-ā-Tāne” - a kainga for numerous species of trees, plants and animals - is poetic and meaningful, for it is a place where there is still space for all creatures of the forest to live and co-exist. In the western conservation tradition, Whirinaki Te Pua-a-Tāne is precious, rich “wilderness”. The Wilderness that Aldo Leopold conceived as “the raw material out of which man has hammered the artefact called civilization”. For the people we represent, Whirinaki Te Pua-a-Tāne is a special place. It is one of the few large areas of lowland mixed podocarp forest we were able to protect from ourselves for the future. As an outdoor community we visit this place regularly, journey through it, tell stories about it and visit it again. It has a place in our hearts.

FMC particularly notes the vision of the Te Pua o Whirinaki Regeneration Trust to re-seed lost areas of podocarps. FMC was part of the conservation movement seeking to end indigenous forest logging in the 1970's and 1980's. The regeneration of what was taken will, with continued mahi, bring back some of what was lost.

Introduction and Conservation Goals

FMC would like the plan to be more generous with the language describing the natural values of the ngahere, it is not “one of the largest ...” it is, “a living cathedral, an incredible tapestry of life FMC also seeks more ambitious goals for biodiversity protection at a landscape scale; not just “persistence” of threatened species, but action to make them “commonplace, not just an intent to undertake predator control but clear, measurable objectives to ensure its success.

S10 – Natural Environment: More hyperbole is needed to describe the magnificence of this forest. It is not “one of the largest ...” it is, “a living cathedral, an incredible tapestry of life

S19.1.2: Persistence, in the context of this place, where the populations of many species have been eliminated or are mere shadows of what has been, is not a good enough goal. We request an objective that seeks to make threatened species “commonplace, so all visitors encounter and enjoy them”.

S19.1.4: Threat management programmes must have strong objectives to protect the ngahere holistically. We request an objective that defines the residual level of pests (including pigs and deer) sufficient for the forest to regenerate and flourish.

Recreation and Access Goals

FMC suggests significant changes to the recreational clauses in this plan. At a more arcane level, we are unhappy to see the Destination Management Framework given such priority in a statutory plan. It is a crude economising tool that fails to give effect to the Conservation Act or Conservation General Policy, which are much richer in their understanding of recreation opportunity including recognising uniqueness and the importance of considering the wider network of opportunities.

FMC believes ambitious change is needed to the proposed management of front-country recreational opportunities. Existing activities have evolved in an ad hoc fashion, leading to numerous and poorly linked road-ends, tracks and campsites these include the Whirinaki River carpark, the Old Fort Rd/MTB carpark, the Sanctuary campsite, the (non DOC) campsite nearer Minginui, the Arohaki Lagoon Carpark and the Whirinaki Recreation Camp. This has led to a dispersal of people, investment and a serious security problem which is limiting the number of visitors and the length of trips they complete.

Our suggestion is that the plan should provide for the creation of a recreation hub in the vicinity of the Whirinaki Road end, which would provide secure parking, camping and links to all tracks. A caretakers/volunteers quarters would be appropriate. A model perhaps is the Otaki Gorge campground in Tararua Forest Park. This would require significant investment, but we do not believe an increase in recreational activity and consequent benefits for the local community will occur without resolving this issue.

FMC would like to see the plan provide for the increasing of recreational usage by focusing on the unique and existing opportunities the ngahere provides, in particular backcountry tramping and hunting. There are plenty of opportunities for day-walks around the upper North Island but there are few places that enable prolonged immersion in a majestic forest.

FMC also supports the need for guaranteed 2WD access.

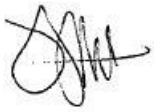
S22.2.4: FMC is strongly supportive of this provision to work with Timberlands to provide practical 2WD public access to road-ends in the South-West of the Park, it is important these accesses include Plateau Rd and the access towards the Hautapu River to the Pukahunui track. FMC would also like the plan to encourage the formation of a recognised public access route to the Park boundary at the Te Hoe river.

S23.2.2: FMC would like the current clauses a) and b) to be replaced with the following, for the reasons outlined above:

- a) Working with Ngati Whare, other iwi and/or hapu and the wider community to provide a recreational hub in the Whirinaki Valley. This would provide camping, secure parking and a centre point for walking and mountain biking tracks.*
- b) Maintaining and promoting the backcountry hut and track network as one of the great forest immersion experiences in the world.*

We wish to be heard in support of our submission.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jamie Stewart', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jamie Stewart

FMC Administrator