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Contribution of the Conservation Estate to New Zealanders' Prosperity and Wellbeing: Three Case Studies

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Abstract

New Zealand's total land area is approximately 26.8 million hectares, of which 8.5 million hectares are administered by the Department of Conservation (DOC). DOC recognises that it needs to partner with others to achieve its outcome statement. The purpose of this paper is to present three case studies where DOC is partnering with community groups so that the local community can gain environmental, social and economic benefits in line with the Department's outcome statement. The authors had previous knowledge of the three case studies and received a small amount of funding from DOC to allow some follow-up interviews with key stakeholders in each of the case studies. The paper is presented in four main parts. Part 1 describes the research questions asked in the stakeholder interviews and explains their purpose. Parts 2, 3 and 4 present the three case studies: The Oparara Valley Project Trust; The Otago Central Rail Trail; and the Kiwi Ranger programme. The paper finishes with a summary of the major common themes revealed through these case studies.

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Contribution of the Conservation Estate to New Zealanders' Prosperity and Wellbeing: Three Case Studies

Introduction

New Zealand's total land area is approximately 26.8 million hectares, of which 8.5 million hectares are administered by the Department of Conservation (DOC) under the Conservation Act 1987 (DOC, 2013a, p. 8). The Department's vision is that New Zealand is the greatest living space on Earth, which is supported by the following outcome statement (idem, p. 10): "New Zealanders gain environmental, social and economic benefits from healthy functioning ecosystems, from recreation opportunities, and from living our history." Its interventions aim to work towards that outcome statement through five intermediate outcomes (idem, p. 11):

1. The diversity of our natural heritage is maintained and restored.
2. Our history is protected and brought to life.
3. More people participate in recreation.
4. More people engage with conservation and value its benefits.
5. Conservation gains from more business partnerships.

DOC recognises that it needs to partner with others to achieve its outcome statement. Indeed its Director-General at the time, Alastair Morrison, commented in his overview for the department's 2012/13 *Annual Report* that "DOC is undergoing a transformational change in the way it sees and does its work ... aimed at engaging all New Zealanders – communities, landowners, local government, iwi and business – in managing nature sustainably" (DOC, 2013b, p. 7).

In that context, the purpose of this paper is to present three case studies where DOC is partnering with community groups so that the local community can gain environmental, social and economic benefits in line with the Department's outcome statement. The authors of this paper had previous knowledge of the three case studies and received a small amount of funding from DOC to allow some follow-up interviews with key stakeholders in each of the case studies.

The paper is presented in four main parts. Part 1 describes the research questions asked in the stakeholder interviews and explains their purpose. Parts 2, 3 and 4 present the three case studies, which were: The Oparara Valley Project Trust; The Otago Central Rail Trail; and the Kiwi Ranger programme. The paper finishes with a summary of the major common themes revealed through these case studies.

1 The Research Questions

Approaching the participants in this project, the research team explained that our purpose was to gather and analyse material on three case studies that would illustrate the contribution of the conservation estate to the New Zealand economy. The purpose of the project was *not* to prepare an evaluation of any of the case studies, which would require more resources than were available for this research. Instead, the researchers prepared a semi-structured interview guide that focused on 13 questions grouped under five headings.

A) Partnership/Project Background

1. How and when did the idea for the partnership begin?
2. What were the things that made confirmation of the partnership: (a) difficult; and (b) feasible?

B) Governance

3. How was the governance structure for the project established?
4. What were the considerations that had to be addressed in obtaining access to the conservation estate for this project?

C) Key Achievements, Outcomes and Impacts

5. What have been some of the key achievements made possible by the project?
6. In what ways has the local community been engaged in the development of the partnership?
7. In broad terms, in what ways does the project / partnership contribute to the local, and the national economy?
8. Are there other ways that the project / partnership has 'added value' (eg to the community, recreationists, environment)
9. What tactics has the partnership used to achieve the value-added?

D) Monitoring

10. Is the project's 'performance' monitored in any way? If so how is performance managed

E) Lessons and Applications

11. What are some of the lessons that have been learned so far: (a) that would lead to doing things differently next time round; and (b) for the future of this project?
12. What lessons would you suggest for similar projects by others in the future? Are there any broad important themes or any specific points that were particularly important?
13. In what ways do you think the partnership (concept/project) could be applied elsewhere?

Interviews took place in Alexandra, Wanaka, Aoraki Mount Cook, Christchurch and Karamea between 25 September and 13 October. Espiner and Stewart carried out the interviews reported in sections 3 and 4 of this paper; Dalziel and Saunders carried out the interview in section 2.

2 The Oparara Valley Project Trust

2.1 Origins

The origins of the Oparara Valley project lie in the decision to create the Kahurangi National Park in 1996, covering 452,000 hectares of the north-western corner of the South Island, most of which had been land administered by the New Zealand Forest Service (DOC, 2011, p. 1). The town of Karamea is surrounded by this national park and as part of the process of creating the park, DOC set up a community consultative committee known as the Karamea Consultative Committee (KCC). This committee continued to meet quarterly after 1996 and one of the items on its agenda was a desire by the community to improve the state of the Oparara Valley, including the area around Fenian Creek and Adams Flat at the southern end of the valley.

This community desire had been of long standing. In October 1980, for example, a formal submission had been made to the Nelson State Forest Park Review of Management that the Fenian and Adams Flat area be developed for outdoor education and small party use, including the building of tracks, a shelter, a campsite, panels identifying trees, shrubs and historic gold mining sites. Further submissions were made over the years and indeed DOC built a new replica of a gold miner's hut at Adams Flat in 1999.

These submissions took place against a background of economic difficulties in the town and surrounding district. The Karamea dairy factory, whose origins went back to a butter factory that opened in 1906, had been substantially upgraded and expanded in 1985 (Karamea Co-operative Dairy Company, 1986; see Figure 2.1). It was a major employer in the town, but closed just five years later in 1992 when milk processing was centralised at a new plant commissioned in Hokitika.



Fig 2.1: Karamea Dairy Factory, 1986

A further economic blow occurred in 1999 when the government announced that native forest logging on the West Coast would end by 31 March 2002 (Swarbrick, 2012). The government set up a Trust fund of \$92million in 2001 as an adjustment package for this loss of indigenous forestry. This fund, which is administered by the Development West Coast charitable trust, created opportunities through its willingness to finance work required to develop proposals for regional economic development on the West Coast. Development West Coast is also able to act as an investment partner in large projects.

In March 2002 the Karamea Consultative Committee prepared a formal proposal for the development of an Oparara Valley track from the Oparara Basin (that is, Moria Gate) through to the lower Fenian. This proposal requested seven steps from DOC:

- Commitment;
- Partnership;
- Assistance – e.g. expertise with paperwork;
- Experience – e.g. success of Seal Colony, Dolomite Point;
- Delegation of staff;
- Timeframe; and
- Implementation.

In response, DOC requested a wider public consultation. A meeting with interested residents of Karamea took place on 6 May 2002, followed by a public notice on 13 May 2002 in the *Chronicle* for submissions on development proposals for Karamea. Of the seven to nine proposals received, five were concerned with the Oparara Valley. On 26 June 2002, a public meeting agreed on an Oparara Valley proposal, to be overseen by a committee of six people. This committee formed the Oparara Valley Project Trust (OVPT) in November 2002.

There were eight trustees, all drawn from the Karamea community: Rosalie Sampson (Chairperson), Norman Stopforth, Diana Storer, Graham Strawbridge, Pat Jones, Dulcie McNabb, Malcolm Hansen and Barry Chalmers. This included a retired Department of Conservation area manager, three other people who had worked for the Department, a motel-owner, an hotelier, a horticulturalist and a local historian and information officer for the Karamea Information and Resource Centre.

The Trust sought a Patron from the project, approaching British celebrity conservationist and Sir David Bellamy, who agreed. This further increased the credibility of the proposal with DOC staff, who prepared a Memorandum of Understanding with the OVPT. There was some negotiations about the wording of the Memorandum that were concluded while people were waiting in the Karamea hall for the signing ceremony! Mike Slater, Conservator of the West Coast Tai Poutini Conservancy of the Department of Conservation, signed the Memorandum with the Trust on 3 March 2003.

In February 2003, the OVPT published a professional scoping report that had been funded from the government's Community Employment Group scheme (Contours, 2003). Within four months, the Trust had completed the first of its proposed developments, repairing 15 km of logging roads for recreational mountain biking. Prime Minister Helen Clark officially opened the 'K-Road' mountain bike track on 2 June 2003.

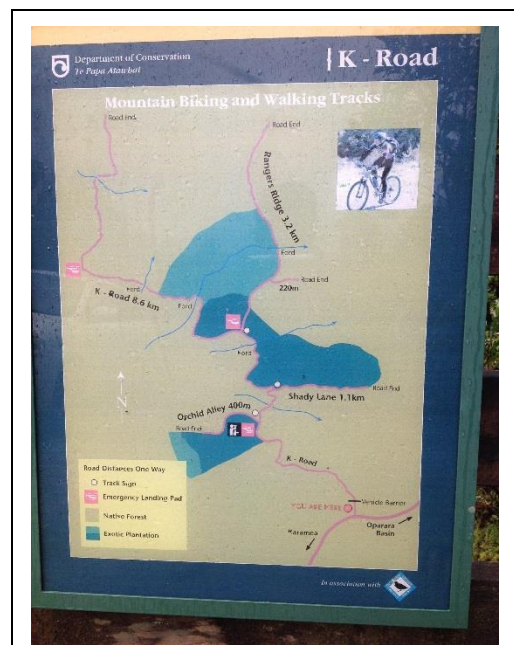


Fig 2.2: Entrance to K-Road, 2013

2.2 Beneficial outcomes and economic contributions

The second phase of the proposed developments required considerably more funds, with the total cost of upgrading existing tracks and building a new track along the Oparara Valley estimated to be around NZ\$3 million. The New Zealand government at the time was offering funding on this scale for major regional initiatives as part of its Regional Partnership Programme, and so the OVPT prepared a proposal to that programme. The Regional Partnership Programme required regions to demonstrate that there would be economic benefits sufficiently large to justify investment in a major regional initiative.

This could have been difficult for the OVPT, since National parks are not permitted to charge an entry fee and so there is no direct compensation for infrastructure that succeeds in attracting new visitors. Nevertheless, the use of public funds could be justified if the investment is expected to create sufficiently large new business opportunities in the area, particularly through extra demand for accommodation, meals, transport and retail sales. Thus, the March 2002 proposal had identified four economic benefits, including:

- Employment for the track cutting, development and interpretation;
- Employment for long-term track and area maintenance;
- Employment for guiding; and
- Economic benefits from increased tourism visits.

It also identified social benefits from increasing community access to and appreciation of its natural and historical heritage, plus the practical benefit of taking some pressure off the Honeycomb Hill caves.

The next step was to prepare a formal cost-benefit analysis, which was commissioned from two of the current authors (Dalziel and Saunders, 2007). The analysis identified annual operating costs (including maintenance costs, the opportunity cost of the initial investment and a marketing budget) for the proposed track and compared these costs with the local economic impact of an increase in tourist numbers (10 per cent) and an increase in the average length of stay (from 1.6 days to 2.1 days). This demonstrated a positive benefit, which was confirmed in most scenarios modelled under the report's sensitivity analysis.

The managers of the Regional Partnerships Project determined that the project did not fit the criteria for a major regional initiative investment and so the trustees resubmitted the proposal to the government's significant community based projects fund. This time the application was successful, with an announcement in May 2006 that the government would provide up to \$1.8 million (with the remainder coming from local sources, most notably from the West Coast Development Trust).

The OVPT called for expressions of interest to build the track and held a joint meeting with the nine potential contractors that replied. Three tenders were submitted, but none were accepted. Instead the Trust decided to build the track itself, employing Malcolm Hansen on secondment from the Department of Conservation as project manager and construction leader. The other members of the track construction team were David Guppy, Tony Hynes, Pat Jones, Peter Moynihan and Richard Roberts.

Throughout the project, a close eye was kept on the rate of progress and the control of expenses, including fortnightly breakfast meetings during critical periods. The track was built to the exacting standards required by DOC, who had the final word on issues such as the path of the track. The whole team is proud that the track was built on schedule, within budget and accident free from the first day of work (15 December 2006) to the track's official opening on 8 November 2008.

The track was officially opened by the Trust's patron, Sir David Bellamy, who described the project as part of a "green renaissance" (Tourism New Zealand, 2013):

"Here we have a small community of people who had a heritage and it wasn't accessible and they have made it accessible by working and saying, 'This is a very, very special place'," Bellamy said. "I travel the world a lot, and I find more and more people are fed up and sick and tired of seeing the values our parents and grandparents took for granted disappear. They are solving it themselves and I call that the green renaissance," he said.

Five years later, the Trust continues to be responsible for the maintenance of the track and operates an Oparara Guided Tours business. The track is in outstanding condition, but the view of the trustees is that it is not used as much as it could be, or as much as they had hoped when they started on the project. There is no formal monitoring of the value of the project. Karamea itself continues to struggle, with the 2013 Census recording that the township's normally resident population had fallen from 420 in 2006 to 375 in 2013.



Fig 2.3: Oparara Valley Track, 2013

2.3 Lessons learned

When asked about what lessons had been learned from the experience, the focus group of Trustees offered the following reflections.

- a) Learn from others who have done similar projects and look at a wide range of similar initiatives. For this project, connections with the designers of the Tuatapere Hump Ridge Track in Southland were particularly helpful.
- b) Seek and accept advice from good people who can provide expert costings, economic analysis and so on. Build up contacts and remain connected.
- c) Trust your own knowledge of the project and its validity, especially when you encounter negative reactions along the way.
- d) Prove yourself by delivering what is promised and by being knowledgeable about the constraints imposed on the use of the conservation estate.
- e) Be prepared to work hard and to look for alternatives if a funding application is not accepted.
- f) Work as a team; support and respect each other's contributions.

The focus group had some thoughts on the role of DOC in this project. They thought the Karamea Consultative Committee set up by DOC had been very helpful in initiating the project. It enabled the community to learn more about the way DOC operates and allowed DOC to hear ideas from the community. This created an environment in which a 'coalition of the willing' could proceed with an initiative to see where it might lead.

They thought DOC has a great story to tell about the conservation estate, which should be encouraged. It can be easy to be negative, but good things can be achieved with a positive, helpful attitude: "Don't tell us what we can't do; help us find ways that we can do things." They noted that it shouldn't simply be an expectation that the community will help DOC promote their objectives, but DOC staff will also help the community, for example through their participation as DOC representatives in local events. There also needs to be sensitivity that initiatives by DOC to obtain business sponsorship for the conservation estate do not crowd out small community groups reliant on small amounts of sponsorship for their own survival.

3 The Otago Central Rail Trail

3.1 Origins

Officially opened in 2000, the Otago Central Rail Trail (OCRT) is a 150 kilometre railway corridor converted by the Department of Conservation (DOC) and the Otago Central Rail Trail Charitable Trust from the disestablished Otago Central branch railway line into a public recreational trail. Following the line's closure in 1990, and since the land's transference to DOC in 1993, the OCRT was developed as a long distance off-road trail, set aside for cycling, walking and horse-riding. The trail threads its way through the farm land of the Strath-Taieri, Manuherikia and Ida valleys, over the Maniototo plain and through the Poolburn and Upper Taieri gorges as it interconnects the agricultural and horticultural service towns that lie between Middelmarsh and Clyde.



Fig 3.1: The Clyde Railhead

The accessibility of the rail trail via multiple entrance points permits recreational users to participate in shorter duration activities or combine sections for longer day, overnight or multi-day trips. In addition to providing scenic value and recreational opportunities, the trail also preserves historical railway heritage. Examples of this are the preserved stonemasonry of the viaducts, the workmanship and brickwork of the tunnels and the architectural distinctiveness of the remaining railway buildings.

At the same time, the OCRT acts as a conduit to many other natural and historic sites in Central Otago such as the old gold-mining towns of Ophir, St Bathans and Naseby, Hayes Engineering Works and Sutton Salt Lake (Blackwell, 2002).

Now predominantly promoted and used as a cycle trail, the initial recreational use was more varied, as noted by one interview participant, a Department of Conservation manager:

At the outset it was equally about walking and horse riding as it was about biking; in the early 1990s biking off-road wasn't the done thing. It's really evolved. The landscape here lends itself well to biking – it's open, flat and dry. It wasn't designed as a specialist biking opportunity – it was equally about the other uses.

Although the conservation land that makes up the OCRT has limited significance in ecological or bio-diversity terms, our interview participants emphasised the considerable recreational value of the setting, and the importance of managing for this:

In DOCs world, use and enjoyment of recreation space is as much a part of what we do as conservation of natural heritage. This area is a recreation reserve and it succeeds as that: lots of people enjoying and valuing that. It does have other conservation values. It was built pre-1900s, so in terms of cultural heritage (the culverts, the bridges, how it was built) that's all part of the story of early Otago. In terms of bio-diversity value – it has some but it's very limited. As people we have done our worst to inland Otago in terms of natural values. But it has the potential to tell that story and it does have natural pockets. But it has little biological value (DOC Conservation Manager).

When the railway line closed in 1990, the recreational future of the land was far from certain. Indeed, our interview participants cited evidence of considerable opposition to the idea of a public walking trail through this landscape, with some opponents preferring to see the land returned to adjacent landowners for productive purposes. Opposition was apparent at various scales, including at the level of central government. One Trustee recalls a Member of Parliament famously claiming "you'll be able to see the weeds from the moon" in reference to the likely state of the land should it be managed by DOC for public recreation rather than returned to farmers. Our participants look back on this time with a sense of satisfaction:

It's wonderful. Even within Government at the time there were clear opponents of it [the rail trail]; there was a sense that it was a whimsical idea to provide a cycle trail through rural New Zealand when it could have far better use for farm access or grazing. Although – to be fair – the local mayor was in favour, there was real opposition at a local level too; that it would be better putting it in the hands of the farmers (DOC Conservation Manager).

But the opposition did not last, and through the work of the Trust and DOC, and the support of local businesses, the OCRT became a community focus, and attitudes began to change. Several of our interview participants noted this turnaround in local perceptions of the trail. Commenting on one of the local farmers who now offers accommodation options to trail user, a senior manager from the Central Otago District Council (CODC) suggested that:

He now has beautiful wee cottages on his farm... and he would say that they come off better than his wool cheque! He will tell you that he now really appreciates the Hawkdun Ranges; all these visitors would come from around the country and be in awe. Now he realises that this is actually an amazing place... He'll tell you he was one of the biggest naysayers. He would have said at the beginning that the rail trail was ridiculous...So it's brought people into the local communities and its changing local thoughts and feelings.

A key challenge for DOC and the Trust has been assuring those with farming interests adjacent to the Trail that its development for recreational purposes would not threaten their livelihoods. As one of the Trustees noted:

Understandably they were questioning – who was going to look after 150kms of weeds; people going onto their property; there were one or two farmers who were concerned about people coming onto their property and killing their stock (it got quite dramatic). It was seen as a negative – people having more recreational access to their backyard. Turning that around in the minds of rural people was quite difficult. [So how do you turn that around?] People who were wanting to use the trail respect nature, so they are careful and now the farmers are seeing that they are nice people.

Long-standing members of the Trust also identified the importance of influential members of the community in winning the hearts and minds of locals and, in particular the role played by entrepreneurial women:

I remember those community meetings and, fortunately, the farmers would bring along their wives; the wives turned them round – “I see an opportunity here; we can convert that room into a guest room” – women turned the men around. But now we have some very strong farmer advocates for the trail.

So as the Rail Trail became established, and as the governance structure showed its promise, community feeling about the project became more positive, and locals began to consider ways that the Trail could work for them. While part of the solution here was about creating and maintaining effective partnerships (see section 3.2.2), it was also about a variety of stakeholders acknowledging that their worst fears about the Trail had not eventuated. As stated by a local conservation manager:

It wasn't us [DOC / the Trust] turning them around; it was them turning themselves around. Overtime it transpired that their concerns hadn't been realised. It's also been about being quick to address their concerns.

Although the current number of recreational users of the OCRT is difficult to calculate precisely, there was strong agreement across all our interview participants that the OCRT had experienced impressive and sustained growth in the twenty years since its establishment. DOC has installed track counters at key locations, although a distinction needs to be made between those who use small segments of the trail (such as locals, who might walk or ride sections of the trail for an hour or two several times a week) and those who undertake the whole trail (the vast majority of whom are from outside the region). One respondent – an operations manager for a major bike-hire company – noted that the main ‘whole trail’ markets were Auckland, Sydney, then other North Island locations. Jellum and Reis (2008) suggested that the relative order of generating regions was North Island, South Island, then overseas – a finding corroborated by a Central Otago District Council (CODC) study in 2011. Available figures from DOC show that ‘whole trail’ users grew from 6,260 in 2003/04 to 12,157 in 2009/10 – a 100% increase in six years. Other data show that the numbers of people using the highest use section of the Trail (Poolburn) more than tripled between 2003/04 and 2009/10, from 7,678 to 24,062 (pers. comm., Mike Tubbs, DOC).

3.2 Beneficial outcomes and economic contributions

Through interviews with participants knowledgeable about the OCRT history and development, we were able to capture a sense of how this public conservation land has contributed to the social and economic fabric of the region across its twenty year existence. Two broad themes emerge from the case study: i) the revitalisation and economic development of the community; and ii) the role of governance and partnership. The remaining discussion is focussed on these two themes.

3.2.1 Community revitalisation and economic development

Core among the benefits of the OCRT identified by our participants were its contributions to revitalising the local community spirit, and the overall economic opportunities it has made possible.

The Trail has become so much more than the physical line that you bike on; the trail is the community facilities, pubs, hotels and retailers that are provided around it (DOC Conservation Manager).

Blackwell (2002), completing one of the earliest studies of community and visitor perceptions of the OCRT, found evidence of wide benefits across stakeholder groups. Central among his findings was the idea that the OCRT (at the time less than 10 years' old) had "helped to build local community identity and solidarity by enhancing the value and pride that local residents attached to their area" (p. 108). Blackwell cited examples of this community bonding around local projects, such as the beautification of the former station site at Lauder, and the collaborative actions of the Wedderburn community to relocate and restore the former railway goods shed – "a valued part of the historical and cultural heritage of the local area" (ibid).

Residents of communities neighbouring the Trail viewed the OCRT as "a means of sharing, preserving and enhancing the historic, cultural and natural heritage of the local area" (Blackwell, 2002, p. 110). In addition to perceived economic benefits, and the community development benefits, Blackwell reported that his participants were able to expand their social horizons through contact with trail visitors. According to Blackwell, this contact (that would not have occurred without the rail trail) had "the potential to reduce the negative perceptions that some local people might have previously held about strangers" (idem, p. 109).

A similar theme is articulated by one of the founding Rail Trail trustees, who emphasised the key achievement of the Trust's work is the economic development that has come from it:

The communities were dying, a lot of them had lost their schools, they were losing their population. It was dwindling. This [trail] has turned it around amazingly. There are purpose built buildings now. Ophir, for example, has been turned around with really upmarket accommodation and restaurants. There are beautiful old buildings being restored and used for the right purpose. Apart from the economic benefits it's brought pride back into the communities and that is one of the best things that could have been done.

This heritage and community pride perspective is also adopted by a senior manager from the Central Otago District Council (CODC):

The trail has been incredibly critical in terms of community development. In the 1990s the region was declining because of its industries. If the rail trail had not come along, those communities would be in a really sad space. It's revived them; it's restored their heritage.

In addition to the perspectives of our interviewees, other data suggest that the OCRT has had a positive economic impact on the region. For instance, Jellum and Reis (2008) undertook a survey of businesses located in settlements in the vicinity of the OCRT. Nearly half (43%) of all businesses surveyed reported that the Trail was 'important' or 'very important' in their decision to enter into the business. Approximately 40% of businesses attributed at least 40% of their turnover to OCRT users. The authors concluded that the OCRT has become a significant part of the local economy, although its contribution is uneven.

Furthermore, the Central Otago District Council (CODC) undertook a visitor survey of Rail Trail users in 2011, in part to quantify the economic benefits that events and visitors bring to the district. The estimated economic impact of the Trail to the inland Otago economy was estimated as \$12.3 million (a figure the CODC considers conservative since only those who undertook the whole trail were factored into the analysis) and 121 (FTE) jobs. Depending on the measure, this represents a 61% to 78% increase on the economic impact derived from a similar survey in 2008/2009. The largest contributors to these estimated economic impacts are accommodation, package operators and food and consumables.

As a return on investment in public conservation land, the OCRT has a number of tangible and perceived social and economic benefits. Naturally, there is also an economic cost associated with the delivery of the recreation and tourism opportunity in this setting. Details provided to us indicate that the OCRT development and maintenance costs (1994-2011) total \$4.72 million (DOC, 2013), approximately 70% of which came from DOC's operating budget, 20% from the OCRT Trust and 10% from other sources (Railcorp Properties, Taskforce Green and concessions). Current annual average expenditure (based on a four year average) is approximately \$300,000, around two thirds of which comes from the DOC operating budget, and one third from the Trust. In addition to this, approximately \$110,000 is budgeted for capital works (track resurfacing and signage) per year. On the face of it, these seem relatively small sums of money for the apparent social and economic return described by our participants; as one conservation officer revealed:

Nationally, the scale of the economic contribution [of the Rail Trail] is small but don't underestimate the difference it's made in a small local place. It's hugely significant. The thread it's put in the community to have a collective interest in – you can see it's brought the community together for something common. It's made those things real.

Bikes mean business

The economic and social contribution of the Otago Central Rail Trail (OCRT) is nicely illustrated by the success of cycle hire businesses operating at various points along the route. There are currently nine cycle hire businesses servicing the OCRT, the largest of which is Trail Journeys, which has responded to the needs of trail users with depots at Clyde and Middelmarsh – the bookends of the Trail.



Fig 3.2: Trail Journeys at the Clyde Railhead

While Trail Journeys offers a range of cycle-based recreation activities in the Central Otago area, the vast majority of its clients are those using the OCRT. Trail Journeys has been in operation for eleven years, and employs 25 staff in the peak season (Nov-April), including several administrative staff, multiple shuttle bus drivers, and four young bike mechanics. In the low season, a smaller staff is retained (estimated at about 10 people; Rail Trail Operator).

Trail Journeys offers a range of services to meet the varied demands of the OCRT users. Distinct user segments have been identified by the company, most of which correspond to the seasons. A pre-Christmas profile appears to include “mothers with children; then, after Christmas, the dads arrive. In January and February, the backpackers begin to dominate, and in March – April it’s the over 50s”.

Goods and services offered by the company range from simple bike hire, through to provision of panniers and other equipment including child seats and trailers, transfers to and from the track, accommodation and transport hubs, and the relocation of bags between overnight stops on the Trail. The company also provides guide-assisted trips for large groups, including school and sports groups from New Zealand and Australia. During peak season, the company issues approximately 100 bikes a day. Our informant estimated that, in one year, perhaps 4,000-5,000 people would use the company’s services. Busy days during March and April were described as “bedlam” and “like a supermarket check-out” as people arrive mid-morning for the fit-out and to begin their rides (Rail Trail Operator).



Fig 3.3: Trailers for all eventualities



Fig 3.4: Trail Journeys Bike Depot at Clyde

The bikes used by Trail Journeys have been designed and purpose built for the OCRT under contract (in China). This tailor-made approach is a good illustration of the depth of investment in this enterprise. All bikes are serviced by local mechanics at the Clyde site (Rail Trail Operator).

The Trail Journeys site is leased from DOC and its building is situated immediately adjacent to the OCRT Trail Head at Clyde. In addition to hiring all of the necessary equipment, riders can purchase merchandise from the small shop attached to the business, and obtain a stamp for their Rail Trail 'passport'.

The case of Trail Journeys is illustrative of the way the Central Otago region has reinvented itself as a cycling 'Mecca'. In this regard the utilisation of public conservation land for recreation and tourism appears to have been a large success. It needs to be emphasised, however, that the appeal of the OCRT is at least in part a result of careful product 'positioning'. In this respect, the timing of the trail developments was significant – responding to the rise in mountain biking as a recreational pursuit and creating a destination for a population bubble cresting the career hill. As this CODC manager points out:

The Rail Trail is important in the tourism space but also important in terms of the social situation of New Zealand where the population is aging. Because if you look back, New Zealand marketed itself as the adventure playground but as you get older they still want to think they are interested in adventure but they don't want to swing off the end of things. While we want to go and ride 50kms we also want to sleep in a decent bed; and have a spa!

The extent of the business development opportunities associated with the Rail Trail are further highlighted by our CODC informant:

There are more operators than we've ever had. I think there are more than 20 package providers – Trail Journeys the biggest among them. We have 387 tour operators for Central (accommodation; vineyard; bike hire). At the operators group they said they had about 70 specific to the Rail Trail. But it's more than that; yes, we definitely have bike shops we wouldn't have had, but we've got a whole lot of new businesses; new eating places; new accommodation too.

One of the more unusual and quintessentially Central Otago enterprises to emerge alongside the Rail Trail is the establishment of a winter sports park in the small alpine town of Naseby. This complex includes an all-year, indoor, dedicated Olympic-standard curling rink; an outdoor ice skating rink ;and a natural (outdoor) ice luge track, which is the only one of its kind in the southern hemisphere. One CODC manager emphasised the significance of the Rail Trail underpinning this recent venture: "Its survival and viability is because of the Rail Trail".

3.2.2 Partnerships and governance

In addition to the various economic and community development benefits described above, a second major theme among our interviewees related to partnerships and governance. The success of the OCRT over nearly twenty years is due in part to the nature of the innovative and enduring governance structure, and the ability of trustees to manage relationships among diverse interest groups. Our interviewees intimated that relationships among stakeholders have not always been easy, but patience and some compromise have helped ensure positive outcomes. A founding member of the OCRT Trust explains the focus in the early years:

At the outset of the project DOC realised that they'd need some help to fund the project so they decided to arrange a private trust in 1994. We were involved right from the very beginning and our main task at that stage was to raise funds. Our role has grown. It was a new experience for

DOC to work in such close partnership and that has grown into something I would call a true partnership. A lot of learning on both sides. We always have combined meetings and I think the partnership has strengthened through the years.

As well as support for the funding of the project, DOC has benefitted from the Trust's local influence, and the significance of this public face for the Rail Trail shouldn't be underestimated. In particular, the Rail Trail has given DOC the opportunity to initiate conversations about conservation with various stakeholders, as this DOC manager points out here:

Clearly a part of the logic about constructing the Trust was to give a community face to the Rail Trail. Let's get local people who are advocates of it and front with DOC in the early days.

With the Rail Trail, DOC took on 600 kms of boundary as a neighbour so that was a huge undertaking. Having those 600kms of boundary it's given the department a presence in those places and given us a real connection to discuss things much wider than the Rail Trail. It's been very positive for us.

Another successful dimension of the partnership between DOC and other stakeholders in the project has been coordination on the promotion of the Rail Trail. The Trust was instrumental in forming an 'operators group', which from small beginnings is now attracting genuine interest and investment, according to the Trustees:

To get some continuity so the operators could help each other we approached the chamber of commerce to form a group. It's taken a while to get functional but it's working now as there are businesses seriously in business. It's not just a side activity. They are from Australia, Auckland – from all over NZ. It's serious and they are investing big money and they want to make it work.

Several of our participants also mentioned a new marketing group specific to the promotion of the Rail Trail. This group includes representatives from the operators group, the Trust, DOC, Tourism Central Otago, and Tourism Dunedin. This attempt to create a coordinated approach to the promotion and branding of the Trail is another good example of the partnerships model adopted for this conservation setting. Support for the Rail Trail and associated initiatives has also come through grants and bequests, "another indication that people have liked what has been done" (Rail Trail Trustee), helping create a Trust that is now financially self-supporting.

A simple partnership between DOC and a charitable trust, which began as a single-page MOU, has stood the test of time. Over twenty years, the partnership has broadened to encompass other elements of the local community, especially business interests. The Trust-DOC partnership appears to work well because it provides, on the one hand, centrally coordinated continuity, and, on the other hand, a local focus and a community face. Moreover, the Trust's efforts are totally voluntary:

The Trustees don't take any money out of the Trust; we don't get reimbursed. Every penny we raise goes back into the Trail. People believe in the Trail. It's twenty years since I've been on the Trust and it's such good fun. There are so many good things happening, you just want to be part of it. (Rail Trail Trustee).

3.3 Lessons learned

Our interviewees were able to identify a number of critical lessons for success and these may be applied to similar ventures based on public conservation lands.

- a) There will always be some opposition; just give things time, endure the opposition in the early days, listen to what people say and help local people to realise that it's not going to be a threat but an advantage.
- b) It is important to take the people and the communities with you. Success will be dependent on those people loving it and owning it.
- c) Work with each other; not against each other! You might be in competition but you are complementary – it's hard to get your head around that. If you can work together we are much stronger.
- d) This is a public-private partnership initiative that is sustained by both but heavily dependent on a large public commitment of money and staff time.

4 The Kiwi Ranger Programme

4.1 Origins

Based on a United States programme, “Kiwi Ranger” is a national network of experiential interpretation sites, designed to help young people and families connect with key conservation places. At each site, Kiwi Ranger uses a booklet of activities and a collectable badge earned on completion, both of which are unique to each site. The Kiwi Ranger programme was developed by Mick Abbott and Carli Richter of *Shades of Green*¹ with support for the development of some pilot sites from the University of Otago and the Otago Institute of Design. The specific goals of Kiwi Ranger are:



Fig 4.1: Kiwi Ranger Booklets and Badges

- i) To promote the value of conservation, with a special focus on families and young people;
- ii) To increase New Zealanders' engagement in conservation by encouraging personal connections with special places (which ultimately might lead to greater responsibility and action for conservation);
- iii) To create connections between rural and urban conservation sites and agencies enabling a variety of conservation experiences and fostering collaborations between conservation agencies;
- iv) To provide a site-specific educational tool that supports staff engagement with the community;

¹ Developers of every site's booklets and activities, and owners of the intellectual property associated with Kiwi Ranger – see <http://kiwiranger.org.nz/>.

- v) To provide an opportunity for international visitors to learn about New Zealand's conservation values; and
- vi) To foster understanding and appreciation of conservation places through promotion of the national network of *Kiwi Ranger* sites.

The Kiwi Ranger initiative aligns with DOC's strategic documents including its National Education Strategy 2010-2030 (Crisp, 2011), the Destination Management Framework (DMF), the Department's Statement of Intent 2011-2014, and the education and advocacy elements of Conservation Management Strategies (CMS).

Mick Abbott and Carli Richter worked with Department of Conservation ranger Annabelle Studholme to create the first Kiwi Ranger programme at Arthur's Pass National Park in 2009. By June 2013, the Kiwi Ranger programme had been implemented at eleven conservation sites across New Zealand. A further 5 North Island sites were scheduled to be launched by December 2013, creating a total of 10 South Island and 6 North Island sites. This would include at least one Kiwi Ranger site within 30 km of each of New Zealand's four main urban centres (Espiner, 2013; see also Leigh, 2013).

While the first 'generation' of Kiwi Ranger booklets was developed for distribution at icon sites such as national parks, an important goal of among those responsible for its national implementation was that Kiwi Ranger would reach beyond the traditional, remote conservation lands. As noted by one DOC Education Manager:

Of course we started with national parks; it made sense – you've got a visitor centre and it's easy to distribute booklets and have people come back in, so those were obvious places logistically, and they fit the model of other similar programmes in the States and Europe. We wanted to look beyond that and get into places close to urban centres.

4.1.1 Audiences

According to the Kiwi Ranger National Plan (DOC, 2010), the intended audiences of the programme are: New Zealand families, specifically with primary school-aged children; children aged 7-12 – via families or school groups; young New Zealanders and international visitors. Case study participants think that the intended audiences are being reached:

We initially targeted visitors who were travelling through the country so they could pick up the activities in the various Parks; but it's become much broader than that. Visitors love it (DOC Conservation Manager).

DOC staff at Aoraki Mount Cook National Park (AMCNP) indicated that Kiwi Ranger was becoming very popular, to the extent that people now came into the visitor centre and specifically asked for the programme. According to one reception staff member, the programme is especially popular with children visiting from America.

4.1.2 Programme participation

Table 4.1 summarises the total Kiwi Ranger (KR) booklets and badges distributed at programme sites since inception. The date of programme adoption is also recorded for each

site. Since the programme's inception in 2010, nearly ten thousand Kiwi Ranger booklets have been distributed across eleven conservation sites (Espiner, 2013). Two thirds (66%) of booklet recipients have been awarded a Kiwi Ranger badge. This represents a substantial degree of interest among visitors to conservation sites, and suggests that the Kiwi Ranger programme has potential to engage, influence and entertain the visiting public using a format not previously established in New Zealand (idem).

Table 4.1: Total KR booklets and badges distributed since inception by conservation site

Conservation Site	Programme start date	Booklets distributed	Badges issued
Aoraki Mt Cook	2010	500	500
Arthur's Pass	2010 (Dec)	2,500	2,000
Denniston	2012 (Jan)	400	400
Franz Josef	2011	500	350
Mount Aspiring	2011	1,500	800
Nelson Lakes	2010 (Dec)	1,300	700
Orokonui	2010		
Punakaiki	2012 (Oct)	422	154
Ōtamahua/Quail Island	2012 (Dec)	1,000	500
Tiritiri Matangi	2013 (June)	300	250
Totaranui	2012 (Dec)	610	393
Totals		9,032	6,047

Source: Espiner (2013).

4.2 Beneficial outcomes and economic contributions

Over a relatively short period of time (2010-13), Kiwi Ranger has established itself as a promising vehicle with multiple outcomes beneficial to conservation and the economy. The interviews with case study participants, in combination with other available data and documents, helped identify two broad themes, both of which are pertinent in social and economic terms: i) community engagement in conservation (with a focus on young people and families); and ii) partnerships (schools, DOC, other agencies (tourism and local authorities) and other commercial business).

4.2.1 Community engagement in conservation

A clear theme among those responsible for the delivery of the Kiwi Ranger programmes was its capacity to engage young people and their families in conservation settings. Several participants emphasised that it gave children and parents a focal point for their visit to the natural heritage site.

The whole focus of the programme is not about being right or wrong, it's about engagement – an opportunity to capture the hearts and minds of young people – and their parents (DOC Partnerships Manager).

Many of the case study participants emphasised the capacity of Kiwi Ranger as a learning tool that is enhanced if it is shared between parents and their children:

If you've got children and parents learning together, valuing conservation and for conservation to be part of their identity happens more quickly than parents hearing it second-hand through schools. I'm not saying that formal education doesn't have its role but we saw Kiwi Ranger as a way to facilitate kids and adults learning and experiencing the wonders of the natural world together (DOC Partnerships Manager).

Furthermore, one DOC Educator noted that this inadvertent learning is not limited to children, and that the benefits of the Kiwi Ranger programme also accrue to adults:

A lot of adults are quite intimidated about not knowing anything about places like Arthur's Pass; not feeling comfortable in a place like that. Some people are very anxious about getting off the beaten track because it's something they've never done – not feeling comfortable to make that step. The Kiwi Ranger booklet facilitates that step and it does so through the children leading it. Parents learning too might not be the primary intention but it's great by-catch!

The staff at AMCNP were very keen to see Kiwi Ranger implemented in their region after seeing it established at Arthur's Pass National Park. According to DOC Conservation Managers, they were already doing some activities aimed at children through the existing LEOTC (Learning Experiences Outside The Classroom) programme, but the Kiwi Ranger initiative "brought it all together so well. It's a winning recipe: the colours and the badges...". Others also emphasised the importance of fun in creating a greater engagement at the place:

Usually they [KR participants] don't even realise they are doing it. Because Kiwi Ranger is marketed as a fun thing to do while you're on holiday, they're not thinking 'I'm learning something'. Probably the scavenger hunt is the most simple but most popular thing. It really makes them look more closely at their environment and notice what's around them (DOC Education Manager).

Asked about the ways in which they felt Kiwi Ranger could add value to a visitor's experience of AMCNP, both DOC Conservation Managers agreed that the programme has added structure to young people's visits: "Kids used to race around the visitor centre and not pick up much. Now they can discover more within a loose structure – it's not formal, but it does provide some focus; and parents do it with them [the children], which makes for good family time".

In some cases, participants noted that Kiwi Ranger met a demand that DOC has struggled to fulfil in recent years. “We weren’t seeing a lot of schools before; only because before we had nothing to offer them. But now that they have a programme, it’s great” (DOC Conservation Manager). Similarly, at AMCNP it was noted that since the DOC summer programmes are no longer on offer “Kiwi Ranger can fill that role to some extent”.

As part of completing the Kiwi Ranger programme, participants are asked if they would like to make a statement about what they will do when they return home “that is good for nature and the environment”. These are recorded in each participant’s booklet and, in some cases, copied and displayed within the Visitor Centre where the programme was completed. In his evaluation of the programme at Arthur’s Pass and Paparoa National Parks, Espiner (2013) found that approximately 40 per cent of Kiwi Ranger participants had recorded a conservation ‘pledge’ and of these, most (72%) claimed that the ‘pledge’ had been completed 3 weeks after the visit to the conservation site. Typically these ‘pledges’ are action-orientated and illustrate a positive conservation view and/or values gained as a result of completing the programme (e.g. “I am going to reuse, recycle, reduce and limit the amount of water I use”).

The level of engagement facilitated by the Kiwi Ranger programme was thought to have the potential to help realise a more environmentally literate populace who feel a sense of ownership or guardianship over public conservation lands, and who reap the personal and social benefits of recreating in these places. Communities who appreciate and use conservation lands are not only likely to be more productive contributors to the economy; recreationally active communities are likely to reduce health care costs. Furthermore, communities who understand the benefits of conservation land are more likely to support their retention, thereby preserving the myriad of ecological services provided by the public conservation estate.



Fig 4.2: Pledge Board in Wanaka

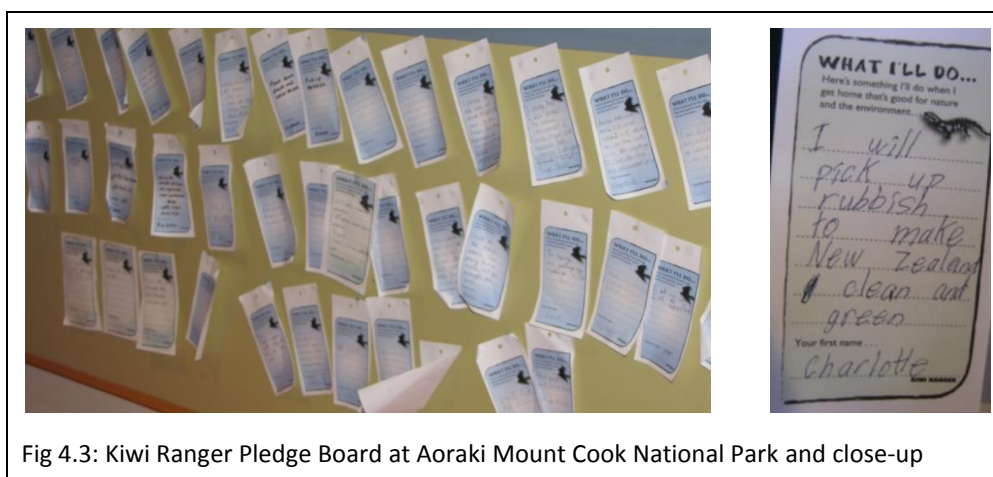


Fig 4.3: Kiwi Ranger Pledge Board at Aoraki Mount Cook National Park and close-up

4.2.2 Partnerships

In addition to the long-term benefits associated with community engagement, the contribution the Kiwi Ranger programme is making through the forging of partnerships between DOC, schools, business and other government agencies has potential to promote inter-sector efficiencies, opportunities for product enhancement and shared responsibility for conservation across the community.

Although the set-up has been reasonably resource-hungry, it's given DOC the opportunity to partner and develop relationships with others who will be able to pick up and run with this. So conservation becomes everybody's business and it's not just the Department's business how someone experiences conservation; it can be done through Trusts and all sorts of others (DOC Partnerships Manager).

Beyond the initial partnering with *Shades of Green*, Kiwi Ranger has promoted partnerships between DOC and the community; more specifically with businesses, the education sector, community trusts and local government agencies.

Kiwi Ranger works as a product or programme that allows DOC to go out and develop relationships with others, because you've got something concrete, that's of interest to the other party, that's not dominated by one or the other. In actual fact, DOC's quite keen to allow others to lead the programme in other places. So it works in that way; as a point of connecting people and groups together; as a programme it does that well (DOC Partnerships Manager).

Case study participants noted that Kiwi Ranger helps DOC connect to the public (especially young people) and the wider business community. For example at AMCNP the programme was cited as evidence of one way the Department is working with business to help keep visitors in the village a little longer. "If the kids are happy fossicking around for information and discovering things about the Park, the whole family stays longer. Not only do these groups spend longer on their visit, they're also more likely to buy coffee or get lunch here". It was estimated that Kiwi Ranger participants spend approximately twice the time of non-participants in and around the Mt Cook village (DOC Conservation Managers).

Furthermore, in an example of the sort of public-private partnership possible in tourism and conservation contexts, the Hermitage Hotel agreed to sponsor the latest print-run of the Kiwi Ranger booklets. Extending this connection between conservation and commerce, the booklets are also now available at the Hermitage Hotel reception desk for customers to collect (DOC Conservation Managers).

Another example from the Canterbury Conservancy pointed to the successful relationship with the local ferry concessionaire, Black Cat Cruises, for the Kiwi Ranger programme on Quail Island, who came on board..."at the development stage – supporting logistics and with input to the content. Black Cat also contributed to marketing the product...They were great; really supportive and keen to do what they could to help make the programme work". The local rūnanga were also involved in story development and the Lyttelton i-site works as a distribution point for Quail Island programme (DOC Partnerships Manager).

Case study participants from Mount Aspiring National Park noted the pivotal relationships they had developed through Kiwi Ranger with the local school network in the early stages of the programme's development:

At that stage we didn't do a lot of education so when the schools came to us, we sent Jean out with the classes and the booklets. They provided the teacher and the transport. It was just ideal (DOC Conservation Manager).

As one Kiwi Ranger Educator pointed out:

Schools are approached quite a lot from places outside wanting to participate and engage in certain things; but I think you need to get into the schools in a certain way. It doesn't really work if you say this is good and it's going to be good for you. That won't work... So you have to do a bit more than simply say 'this is good for kids'...

The success of the programme at the Blue Pools in Mount Aspiring National Park generated national media interest including a short film documentary and a feature on the TV1 6pm National News (see: <http://tvnz.co.nz/national-news/junior-rangers-join-doc-crew-video-4673793>). Kiwi Ranger has also allowed relationships with tertiary education providers where students learn about and experiment with different design ideas such as the first site at Arthur's Pass National Park.

Partnering with a variety of local community trusts also has been fruitful for the Kiwi Ranger programme, and case study participants noted the potential for additional partnerships of this nature. The following examples were cited by a DOC Partnerships Manager:

- The Denniston programme was funded by the Historic Trust and that's distributed from the Trust – or i-site people.
- Tootaranui was partially funded through the Yanzoon Trust (a big partner for DOC in managing biodiversity work in Abel Tasman NP);
- Tiritirimatangi has the Trust (Friends of Tiritirimatangi), who paid for the programme development, and they are the main distributors of the booklet and the main interaction that people have with the programme;
- Whakatane Kiwi Trust supported the Kiwi Ranger site;
- Waikaremoana – which is a partnership with Tuhoe (it's not live yet, but in development).

Those managing the national roll-out of Kiwi Ranger also acknowledged the critical role played by DOC's partners in conservation and outdoor recreation, whose core business was similar, but managed by other public agencies. In partnering in this way, there was also potential to meet DOC's other key objective in reaching out to metropolitan communities:

If you think about how DOC is set up at the moment; and most of the lands DOC manages are not in urban centres – they're all outside. So, that requires us to work in partnership with others to either utilise regional parks or reserves to create those experiences. As an example, partnering with Auckland City Council is probably our best way forward because heaps of

regional parks are within bussing and driving distance of where people live, and they are managed by the Council. So having Kiwi Ranger operating at those sites is the most practical way to deliver, and that's starting to happen (DOC Education Manager).

Most of the Kiwi Ranger sites that have come on board so far have a partnership element to them, and this clearly fits with the new strategic direction of the Department.

Kiwi Ranger fits very much with the Department's emphasis on partnering with others. So it really works from that perspective, but it does require investing in key relationships to enable that to happen (DOC Education Manager).

The diverse existing and potential (such as with Kahu Youth Trust) partnering opportunities afforded through the Kiwi Ranger programme illustrate that "we have only scratched the surface at the moment" (Kiwi Ranger Educator); but it is clear that these relationships can develop holistic, cohesive and effective conservation learning opportunities, with the potential to deliver diverse benefits at multiple scales.

4.3 Lessons learned

Our case study participants reflected on the Kiwi Ranger programme and were able to identify a number of critical lessons:

- a) Central coordination is important in a strategic sense - you do need someone or some agency that's looking at this as a whole otherwise you lose that connectivity between sites. This also provides coherence and the level of quality control of the service or product can be controlled.
- b) Create a national identity for the programme's brand and then market it as a network. This gives you opportunity for next steps as well. Unless you've got someone to provide those next steps and somewhere to go, then it's in danger of remaining just a booklet of activities – sitting in a drawer and forgotten about.
- c) Don't be insular; think creatively about partnerships – businesses, schools, other governing agencies.
- d) Talk to the local people who hold the stories.

Conclusion

The three case studies described in this paper illustrate what can be achieved in a project partnership between the Department of Conservation and members of the local community. The Oparara Valley Project Trust was able to obtain central government and local funding to produce world-class facilities, including new mountain biking tracks and a new walking track, that offer more diverse opportunities for outdoors recreation and access to the community's natural and cultural heritage. The Trust members are proud of this community asset, but recognise that at the time of writing, it has not been sufficient to offset Karamea's economic difficulties created by its relative isolation and the loss of two key industries (the dairy factory and native timber sawmilling).

The Otago Central Rail Trail has been more successful as a mechanism for reinvigorating local economies. It is more than just a track along which people can ride. Over the last twenty years, the tourism product that is 'the Rail Trail' has evolved to a point where it can cater for a diverse range of visitor types (from school groups to families and international visitors) and provide an array of associated services (from bike hire and baggage relocation services, to cafes, bars and accommodation). This tourism product, the result of a unique partnership harnessing public conservation land, the skill and commitment of the volunteer community and the creativity and enterprise of business, has played a significant role in the economic and social reinvention of a region.

Kiwi Ranger is emerging as a successful programme engaging New Zealand and international visitors with positive conservation experiences (Espiner, 2013; Kiwi Ranger National Plan, DOC). The conservation managers and educators interviewed for this case study have emphasised the potential of the Kiwi Ranger programme to achieve multiple social, environmental and economic goals through creative use of partnerships focussed on public conservation lands. In a preliminary evaluation of the programme's capacity to meet its intended objectives, Espiner (2013, p. 13) concluded:

"What is already evident is that KR appears to be a relatively small investment with high potential to produce beneficial outcomes over time, including improved conservation awareness and interest among young New Zealanders, greater engagement between the public and the Department and enriched visitor experiences of conservation lands".

It is always difficult to know how much weight to place on evidence gathered from a case study, since every case study has unique features. In this case, the value is enhanced by drawing on three case studies that appear to offer similar lessons from their diverse experiences. The authors note that Sport New Zealand has created a Sport and Recreation Case Study Toolkit (see www.srtoolkit.org.nz/) so that over time participants in the sport and recreation sector can draw on a wide range of case studies to draw their own conclusions about critical factors for successful projects. This paper is offered as a contribution to that goal.

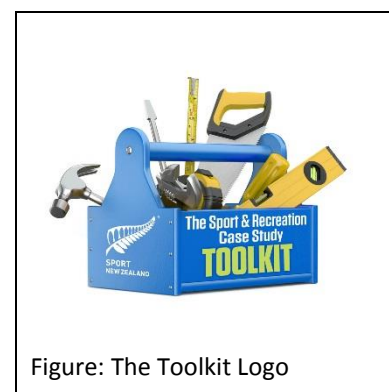


Figure: The Toolkit Logo

Each of the case studies presented in this paper concluded with a list of lessons learned from the respective partnerships. From these lists, some key messages emerge about what contributes to a successful project.

First, a successful project typically requires diverse skills and initiatives from the community, harnessed creatively to build supportive teams and encourage involvement. This can include setting up a community-based trust with trustees chosen for their skills and commitment to the project. It may involve specific commercial partnerships with local businesses contributing to specific aspects of the project. The project might be enhanced by relationships with local schools that are in tune with the educational objectives of their pupils. The project may set out to support new ideas proposed by entrepreneurs to create further business opportunities.

Second, the commitment of resources by the Department of Conservation to a successful project should not be underestimated. The community partners must therefore appreciate the conservation goals and budget constraints of the Department, recognising that it is essential to be accountable for achieving genuine community benefits (which of course are wider than simply economic goals) when using public funds. The project needs to build up its credibility through a history of meeting milestones on time and within budget.

Third, successful projects recognise when there is a need to obtain professional assistance. This includes learning from similar projects in other parts of New Zealand or (in the case of Kiwi Ranger, for example) overseas. The need for expert advice on project costs or economic analysis is perhaps obvious, but there may also be a need for expert advice on quality control mechanisms, successful marketing strategies and evaluating programme outcomes.

Fourth, there should be no surprise when a project encounters opposition or conflicting views among its potential stakeholders. The participants in this research project spoke of needing to trust their own knowledge of the project and its validity at the same time as taking time to listen to and respond quickly to different points of view so that communities come to ‘own’ the project. This may include creating a vision where people can see a place to pursue their own aspirations rather than simply being passive bystanders.

Fifth, there may be a creative tension between advantages from centralised coordination of a project and encouraging innovation within the project by supporting decentralised decision-making. The second case study, for example, talked about small businesses being in competition with each other (which encourages innovation) but also being complementary in matters such as national advertising campaigns (which requires coordination). The third case study recognised that central coordination provides coherence, quality control and an overall strategy while recognising that the programme is enhanced by local initiatives.

Finally, we end where we began, with Alastair Morrison’s comment in the Department of Conservation’s *Annual Report* that “DOC is undergoing a transformational change in the way it sees and does its work ... aimed at engaging all New Zealanders – communities, landowners, local government, iwi and business – in managing nature sustainably” (DOC, 2013b, p. 7). The three case studies presented in this paper have illustrated how partnerships between DOC and motivated community groups can contribute to conservation goals while producing economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits to local communities. Such partnerships have the potential to play a significant role in ensuring “New Zealand is the greatest living space on Earth”.

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