

North Island Great Ride Operator Hui

# The Great Rides and the Department of Conservation - Working together

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Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

**Te Kāwanatanga  
o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government





# DOC roles

- Custodian of Public Conservation Land (PCL) and honourable Treaty Partner
- Regulator and supporter of Te Taiao - protect natural and cultural heritage values, fostering recreation and allow tourism
- Management of DOC cycling recreation offering within a portfolio of recreational opportunities on PCL
- Great Ride management
- Partner and stakeholder in the network of Great Rides and others







## Collaboration with NZCT

- We work with MBIE to ensure the success of the NZ Great Rides.
- We engage with NZCT on topics such as Cycle Track Service Standards for Great Rides, e-bikes, and Conservation Management Strategies.
- We take the lead on trail management for some Great Rides and share responsibility with NZCT Trail Managers for others.
- We would also like to acknowledge the role that MBIE-funded trail managers and champions play in supporting biking on conservation land.

## Great Rides on Public Conservation Land

Trail name	Total Km	Km on PCL
Otago Central Rail Trail	152km	150.4 km
Timber Trail	85km	83.0 km (+via DOC easement)
The Old Ghost Road	85km	77.9 km
Queen Charlotte Track	73.5km	71.8 km
St James Cycle Trail	60km	61.7 km
Great Lake Trails	88km	68.4 km
Mountains to Sea – Ngā Ara Tūhono	231km	51.9 km
Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail	315km	55.2 km
West Coast Wilderness Trail	133km	23.5 km
Motu Trails	121km	23.2 km
Remutaka Cycle Trail	125km	21.7 km
Queenstown Trail	138km	18.3 km
Hauraki Rail Trail	160km	7.7 km
Whakarewarewa Forest Loop	33km	7.5 km
Roxburgh Gorge Trail	21km	4.2 km





## Challenges

- Different trail grade approaches
- Every trail is unique – a complex mix of land managers/topography/climate conditions/stakeholders
- Changing climatic conditions – weather bombs/storm damage
- Cost of contractors increasing
- Compliance and nuisance behaviours
- Effective collaboration and partnership takes time
- Funding (CAPEX and OPEX) where visitor use numbers are low and there is limited cost/benefit
- Competing demands for funding





## Cultural Heritage

- Most trails have heritage features or are themselves considered to be a heritage feature
- It is important to ensure protection and conservation of heritage features is considered in management decisions
- Depending on the age of features it may be necessary to obtain legal approval from Heritage NZ prior to work impacting features
- DOC also have policy and procedures for identification, protection, monitoring of impacts on heritage features
- Important to identify and manage all values and ensure that these are known and understood by all working on site, including volunteers

# What we have been working on

Challenges	Progress
Connection and alignment	Focus on co-ordinating efforts on DOC-supported cycling experiences
Inconsistent trail grades	Working with Recreation Aotearoa on consistent approach and alignment – significant progress in last 6 months
Bike proposals on PCL	CMS national review – refined interpretation of Conservation Policies (11 out of 16 regions biking proposals can be considered)
Modernising Conservation Land Management	Proposal to simplify the management planning structure – in progress
Slow concession processing	Clearing the backlog of existing concession applications, improving processing speed
Third parties	Working with third parties to understand management of mountain bike trails, assets and liabilities
Funding	DOC can now apply for MBIE funding. Establishing processes to ensure DOC has co-funding available so can make most of funding opportunities.





## Consistency programme

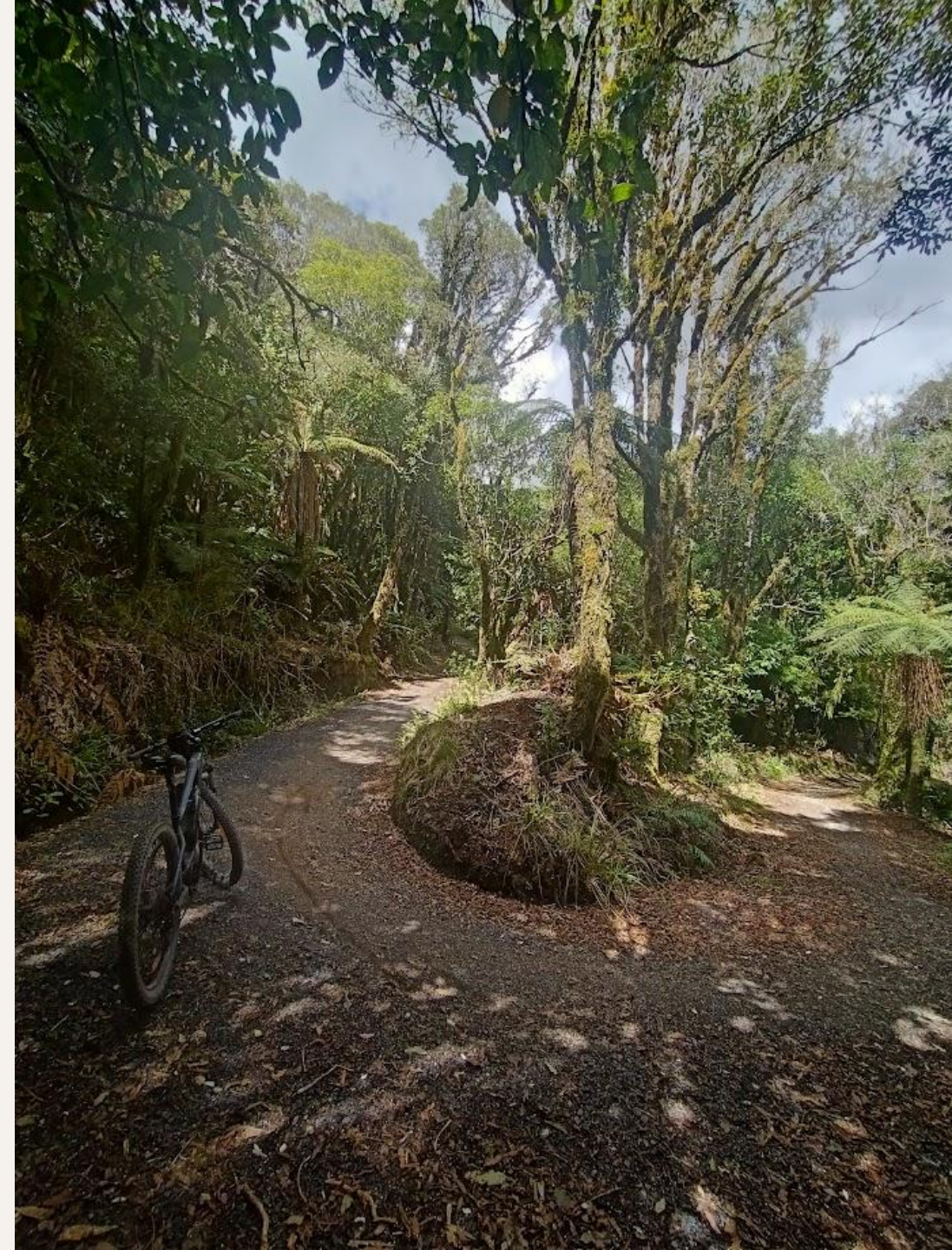
- DOC is working towards improving better management of cycling opportunities across PCL
- Recreation Aotearoa in collaboration with DOC, NZCT, ACC and Sport NZ - new guidelines coming for trail grades, signage and auditing
- DOC will work to adopt new guidelines and audit process, and ground truth and transition from our existing standard
- DOC is also working on consistency of information sharing across cycling provision on PCL
- DOC is working to better understand and manage what we have already before we consider new tracks



# CMS National Review

## - Biking use on PCL

- We re-examined our understanding of the Conservation General Policy requirements for identifying locations suitable for new bike tracks in Conservation Management Strategies (CMS).
- This resulted in a more flexible approach to how we consider bike track proposals.
- We can consider new proposals for bike tracks in locations not already listed in 11 out of the 16 CMS regions.
- We can't consider new proposals for bike tracks for Waikato, Canterbury (Waitaha), Stewart Island/Rakiura, Otago and Southland.
- Any new bike track proposal will still be subject to an assessment of effects, legislative requirements, relevant statutory policies.





# Proposed modernising of Conservation Land Management

- The planning system is too complicated
- The government has limited flexibility to manage land
- Proposed to simplify the management planning structure
- 1 X National Policy Statement instead of the Conservation General Policy (CGP) and the General Policy for National Parks (GPNP)
- 1 NCPS would provide more clarity and certainty for concession applicants and support faster concession decision making
- Under the NCPS - one plan per conservation area





# Concessions

- Working hard to get concession application processing times down
- The total number of applications awaiting decisions dropped from ~ 1300 last September to now under 550
- The processing of these applications in April and May 2025 were nearly 3X faster than the same time last year - up by 180 per cent
- Processing applications quicker means businesses get certainty faster
- These changes will enable and support tourism operators.





# Co-funder

- Great Rides are important to DOC
- We also have lots of different experiences to look after
- Increasing frequency of storms damages our assets and impacts on overall funding
- We need to be more strategic about what we fund, where and to what level of service
- The good news – DOC can now access MBIE funds (Capex and Opex) as long as we can match dollar-for-dollar







## International Visitor Levy – what it is and what it is not

- The current International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy (IVL) investment objectives are to:
  - Increase visitor numbers to maximise the economic contribution tourism makes to NZ
  - Enhance the visitor experience, managing the impact on the conservation estate and retaining public consent to allow for growth
  - Demonstrate robust value for money and alignment with overall government priorities
- IVL funding is not administered as a pool to bid from
- The Ministers of Finance, Tourism and Hospitality, and Conservation jointly agree annual investment plans
- DOC and MBIE prepare investment plans in line with the objectives, which are approved by the IVL Ministers



# Questions?

