

Kaimanawa Forest Park

The proposed Management Plan is notable for the total exclusion of powered vehicle based recreation opportunities. This is despite the statement quoted from the Tongariro Taupo CMS 1.3 /4 “Fostering Recreation Use of Public Conservation Land” and an overall area of 77,348 hectares.

It is interesting to note also the comment under 2.3 “Biodiversity” that “Overall most species of fauna in the park are in decline”. It is curious that The Department of Conservation (DOC) should be promoting the Kaimanawa Forest Park as a wilderness experience when at least one of the significant values is unmanaged. The prime value being advocated appears to be the remote experience where other human contact is minimal. Surely in over 77,000 hectares of mixed terrain there is room for a modest area for vehicle based recreations?

The Clements Mill Road area has a network of old logging routes existing. The provision of reasonable space for Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) and especially 4x4 use, is a potential encouragement for another group of people to experience the environs of the central North Island. The introduction of children to our forests and back-country is vital to the future appreciation of these places and frequently they will return to investigate the other recreational opportunities of an area. At the other end of the spectrum are those many New Zealanders who have in the past walked the many tracks but are now not physically adept enough or have time restraints. The use of vehicles can allow reasonable access to the Kaimanawa environment.

The growth of population and concentrations in urban areas places new pressures on our public lands. Those places that require several days to travel on foot are more heavily used during holiday periods and consequently lose their “solitude” characteristics. By allowing some opportunities for 4x4 travel there is at least the option to get “off the beaten track” in a sense and provide a appreciation of our more remote areas in less time which allows a better spread of park utilisation..

There is acknowledgment on page 29, of prior consultation and submissions at the start of planning for the review of the Management Plan, that recognised mountain biking input. To the best of this writer’s knowledge the NZFWDA was not made aware of that earlier consultation and are subsequently disadvantaged by the proposed Management Plan.

Mountain biking has been recognised and provided with several opportunities in the Kaimanawa Forest on existing roads, along with two other routes and has alternative accommodation in Erua, Rangataua and Tongariro Forest. It is stated on page 77, 7.8 Mountain Bike, that the route from Kaimanawa Road to Tree Trunk Gorge is a former power development road and supports the wear and tear of mountain biking. Since Kaimanawa Rd is one of the few legal public access roads into the park and an existing formed and gravelled road extends to a unique natural feature it would seem not so unreasonable to allow use by vehicles besides mountain bikes.

This vehicle use could be by a permit arrangement, as may any other vehicle use of park routes or land areas.

A permit arrangement would tie in with proposed DOC vehicle management rules (Conservation Law Reform Act). For those future rules to apply, the Kaimanawa Forest Management Plan must recognise possible “permitted” areas. The present philosophy of ruling out any recreational use of vehicles is discriminatory and unreasonable.

The Department acknowledges the public use of vehicles by providing car parks for those who have driven to the Kaimanawa Forest Park for the “sense of remoteness, discovery, challenge, solitude and self reliance”. Should those same experiences only be allowed to those who walk?

“Tramping is one of the main recreational activities in the park”. Under existing DOC management and future proposals as outlined, it is unlikely that it can be challenged as a recreation since alternatives have not been allowed!

The NZFWDA submit that there must be allowance in the Park Management Plan for permitted 4x4 use. It can be demonstrated that managed 4x4 use is viable on light volcanic soils in the central North Island.

The Tongariro Taupo CMS in its present form may not allow permitted, or any vehicle use of the Kaimanawa Forest Park, but that document can and will be challenged in the public interest. Using one document that is halfway through its statutory life, to dictate a future proposal, is in itself unreasonable.