



Tongariro Taupo Conservation Board

Te Poari Papa Atawhai o Tongariro Taupo

Annual Report

2014-2015



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Contents

- 1.0 Chairperson's Report
- 2.0 Introduction of the Board
- 3.0 Membership of the Tongariro Taupo Board
- 4.0 The Area of the Board
- 5.0 Activities of the Conservation Board
 - 5.1 Board Meetings and Field Trips
 - 5.2 Board Committees
 - 5.3 Community of Interest Reports
- 6.0 How the Board has performed in alignment to Boards response letter *To Annual Letter of Expectation*
 - 6.1 Strategic Planning and Policy – CMS Review, CMS Monitoring, NPMP, CMP, Business Planning
 - 6.2 Statutory Processes – RMA & Concessions, Recreation, Historic & Works Approvals, Service Delivery
 - 6.3 Partnerships – Communications Generally (Not Functionally) Including Conservation Week
 - 6.4 He Kaupapa Rangatira – Monitor Progress, Apply Principal Values, Wananga
- 7.0 Liaison
 - 7.1 Other Conservation Boards
 - 7.2 Other Parties

1. CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Working together throughout the year, members of the board have found their stride within the sub-committee framework and succeeded in meeting the requirements of the various task assigned them. Our first significant success was the hosting of the NZCA in the Tongariro Taupo Conservancy. Department of Conservation Staff collaborated with Board members to create a meeting/field trip event which ensured visitors and guest experienced the regions varied natural features and conservation initiatives. A highlight was the groups visit to Wairakei Golf Course Sanctuary to interact with Kiwi.

Other outings and field trips undertaken by the Board focused on geothermal areas of significant natural value and learnings about the scope of conservation work underway to ensure endangered flora and fauna have an intergenerational future.

The monitoring process of the current Conservation Management Strategy, National Park Management Plan, and the Kaimanawa Park Management Plan will be addressed in a limited review based on the Board's 6 strategic principals:

- Protection & enhancement of the natural environment
- Protection of historic resources where they are managed by the department
- Development of an "effective conservation partnership with Tangata whenua"
- Fostering recreation use of public conservation land
- Limiting non-recreation commercial use of public conservation land
- Enhancing advocacy outcomes and community relations.



The Board has received regular reports on the progress of the Ruapehu Alpine Lifts concession process, giving particular note to the aspirations of the Tangata Whenua and adjacent communities, and communities of interest.

There has been considerable time spent receiving presentations from Department staff and community groups on the current use of the Tongariro Alpine Crossing. As the popularity of this exceptional natural asset by both New Zealanders and international visitors has increased significantly, the Board have embedded the monitoring of the condition of the track and the infrastructure supporting the use of the TAC into all meeting agendas.

The use of bicycles in all categories of conservation estate has generated considerable amount of conversation within the Board and resulted in regular reporting by Department staff and community. The age of the current conservation estate strategies and management plans creates dilemmas for the Board. The Board is acutely aware there is a shift in the means by which people are choosing to enjoy the outdoors, specifically, the phenomenal increase in the popularity of "mountain biking" and other motorised vehicles. As assured by Department staff, when the resources become available and Treaty settlements within the region are reaching agreement status, the Board will be able to create a new conservation management strategy and management plan that embrace future use needs, conservation aspirations and natural capital restoration.

John Bishara
Chairperson Tongariro Taupo Conservation Board

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE BOARD

Each board member contributes a unique set of skills, expertise, community connections and most importantly passion. The various communities and communities of interests represented by each member facilitate the board's requirements to be community advocates. As part of their roles, each member participates in sub-committees and liaison roles. In the instance of a local community developing a significant economic and revitalisation project, a board member has attended monthly community planning and consultation meetings, providing up to date reports to the Conservation Board. Members bring to the Board's attention issues arising between conservation estate users. Department staff rely on members being available in an "on duty" type basis to receive, review and respond to matters of both statutory and advocacy nature, such as concession and RMA applications.

Additionally, the Department of Conservation Partnerships Team call upon members to fulfil community engagement roles, which have proven to be fun and rewarding. During the Conservation Awards, Tūroa te Ao – Act for Nature Awards 2014, members participated in judging roles and in the presentation of the awards.

Supporting members to be informed community representatives, the Board undertakes learning through topic presentations from Department staff and other topic experts. Participating in guided field trips to Conservation estate sites of significant natural, cultural and historic value is an essential function of the board. The knowledge gained from these activities expands the members understanding and empowers the board to make informed decisions.

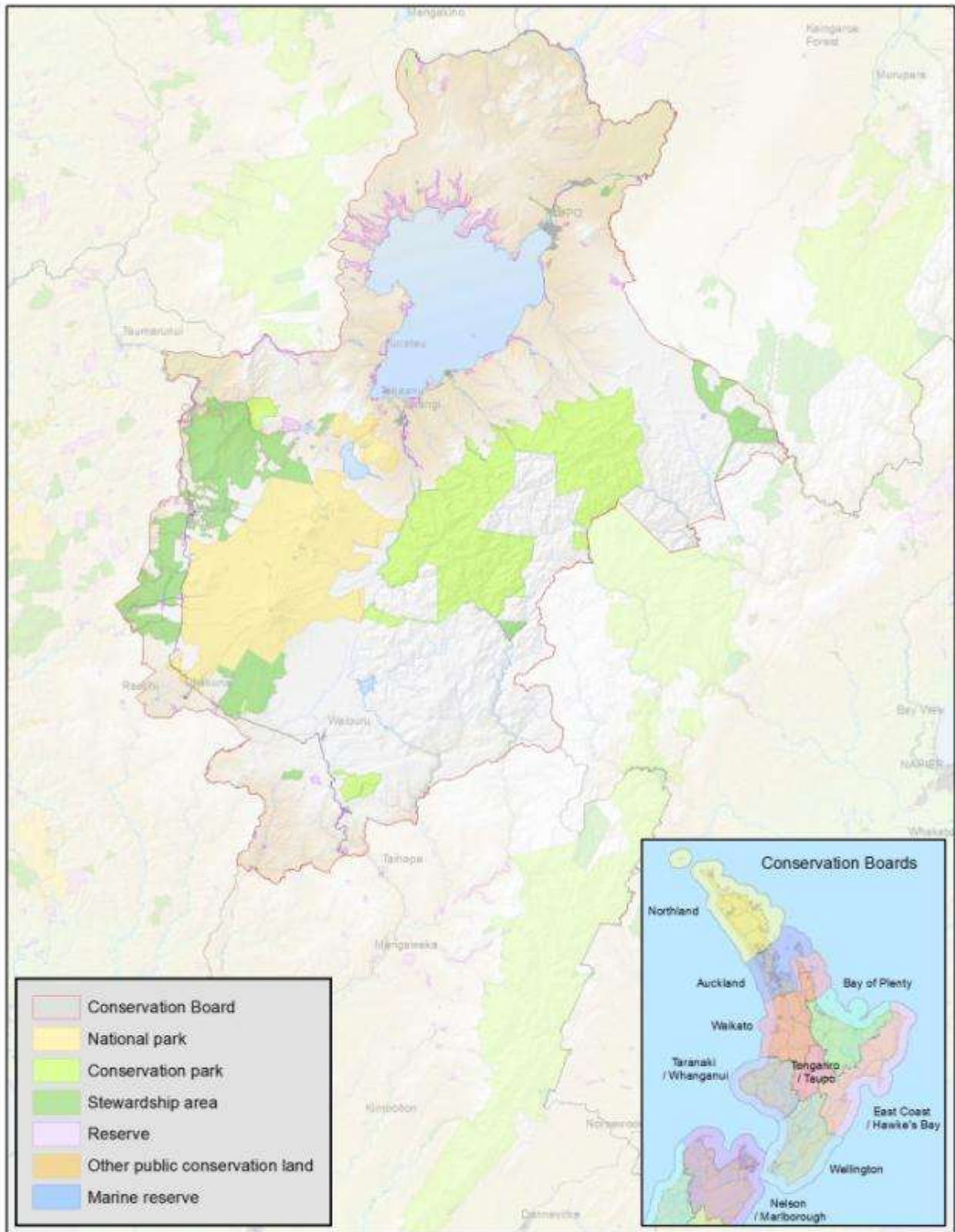


3.0 MEMBERSHIP OF THE BOARD

Members are appointed to the Tongariro Taupo Conservation Board by the Minister of Conservation. Board members represent a wide variety of interests and reside in communities across the Board's region. The Board membership and meeting attendance during the report period was as follows:

Board Member	Home Location	Board Meetings Attended	Liaison Meeting/Functions Attended
John Bishara (Chair)	Wellington	5	1
Mike Britton	Wellington	5	0
Laurie Burdett	Taupo	5	1
Dr Ellen Forch	Auckland	6	1
Colin Paton	Taupo	6	5
Geoff 'Snow' Rameka	Taupo	6	1
Sir Tumu Te Heuheu	Turangi	1	1
Te Ngaehe Wanikau	Turangi	5	1
Peter Zimmer	Owhango	5	12





Tongariro / Taupo Conservation Board

4.0 THE BOARD'S AREA

The Tongariro Taupo Conservancy encompasses Lake Taupo and lies within the heart of the central North Island. The region is composed of some of the finest examples of New Zealand's natural wonders. At the southern end lies Tongariro National Park, New Zealand's first national park and only dual World Heritage site. To the west and east, the Pureora and Kaimanawa Forest Parks contain vast mountain ranges of giant podocarp and beech forest, clear rivers and rare wildlife. Lake Taupo itself and its tributaries are New Zealand's largest source of fresh water and home to a world renowned trout fishery.

The Conservation Board members are active users of this wonderful region and bring great passion to their advocacy and statutory role as collaborators with the Department of Conservation (Te Papa Atawhai), Iwi, local communities and businesses in looking after these unique and iconic places.

Working in collaboration is essential to keep the natural environment healthy; ensuring visitors to the area can enjoy the wide range of recreational opportunities on offer, both now and in the future. Special features like the Huka Falls, the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, Mt Ruapehu adventure sports facilities, river rapids, wildlife sanctuaries and vast forests exemplify the exceptional work undertaken by Department staff and strategic partners to ensure New Zealand's public conservation land is pristine and available for everyone to enjoy.

5.0 ACTIVITIES OF THE BOARD

5.1 BOARD MEETINGS AND FIELD TRIPS

Board Meetings

Meeting date	Meeting Venue
18 July 2014	Department of Conservation Taupo Field Base, Taupo
12 September 2014	Te Kahukura o Tane Mahuta, Taupo (Department of Conservation Offices)
5 December 2014	Otukou Marae, Otukou Turangi
13 February 2015	Owhango Fire Station, Owhango
10 April 2015	Ruapehu District Council Chamber, Ohakune
12 June 2015	Te Kahukura o Tanemahuta Whare, Taupo

Field Trips/Inspections

Field Trip date	Field Trip Destinations
8 October 2014	New Zealand Conservation Authority hosted by Tongariro Taupo Conservation Board – Field Trips to: Wairakei Golf Course and Sanctuary, 5 Mile bay Freedom Camping, Turangi, Lake Rotoaira, Opotaka Historic and Environment Site, Tokaanu Hot Pools, National Trout Centre
5 December 2014	Otukou Marae Visit, Redoubt and the historic shores of lake Rotoaira
13 February 2015	Owhango Alive – Ohinetonga Scenic Researve – Owhango
11 June 2015	Rotokawa Geothermal Site

Field Trips - Summaries

Otukou Marae

Some board members were privileged to stay overnight at the marae before heading out to Te Porere Redoubt, the site of the last major battle of the New Zealand Wars. It was informative to hear an account of the battle at Te Pōrere, in the shadow of Tongariro (1869), and the associated preparations from a Maori perspective. The site is well maintained, has a peaceful ambience, (at least when we were there), expansive views and is an engaging historical site. The visitor interpretation boards at site add interest and understanding, and were further clarified by Board member Te Ngaehe Wanikau.



Opotaka

This historical site on the shores of Lake Rotoaira is credited with the creation of the Ka Mate Haka. The overall potential of the area for tourism and recreation on both the DOC estate and adjacent iwi lands and lake, were informally discussed. The site is close to Rotopounamu which benefits from extensive predator control which now also extends up the slopes of Tihia. There is the engineering achievement of the Tokaanu Power scheme, the tunnel of which is alongside the area. The informal Tihia track has been proposed as a bad weather alternative to the Tongariro crossing. The old tunnel road provides a good basis for this track and could be a short walk alternative. There is a splendid grove of large kaikawaka on a terrace well worth a visit. The Board understands the value in advocating for the natural capital value of the region to be enhanced and protected.

Lake Rotokawa

This geothermal area has limited public access to the site. Primarily due to road closures and the power station site development. In addition, a considerable health and safety risks to visitors exist and ideally requires the use of experienced guides to led tours, as was the case for the Board.

The Board, guests and DOC staff were grateful Dr. Harry Keys Technical Advisor-Volcanology (DOC), Conservation Services led the visiting group, sharing his vast knowledge and geothermal field skills. Dr Keys discussed the variety of geothermal features at site with the group, explaining they were largely unknown to the general public. Of special interest were “*the dog turd fungus*” *pisolithus tinctorius* and the hollows where gases accumulate as a result small dead animals encased in the mud (often pest species). We also visited the adjacent sulphur crystal bank showing some weather effects as a result of tree removal from the area, but still remarkable. It was especially interesting to be shown some of the oldest life forms on the planet and significant interest to the scientific communities. Recent pest plant control was evident with the site now looking quite tidy. At some point, it will be of benefit for Ministers to visit such sites, as the potential for this geothermal area to be a tourist destination is optimum due to its proximity to Taupo. *As a note, the guided tours organised by the Department during Conservation Week and the summer programme are well attended and valued by the public. The Board acknowledges the Nga Awa Purua, Geothermal Power Station (a joint venture between Mighty River Power and the Tauhara North No.2 Trust) for the inclusion of a power station tour as part of the geothermal region experience.*

5.2 BOARD COMMITTEES

- National Issues/ NZCA Liaison – J. Bishara, Sir Te Heuheu
- Neighbouring Conservation Board Liaisons
 - Bay of Plenty – C. Paton
 - Taranaki Whanganui – P. Zimmer
 - East Coast Hawkes Bay – J. Bishara
 - Wellington – J. Bishara
 - Waikato – L. Burdett
- Treaty of Waitangi – J. Bishara, G. Rameka, T. Wanikau, P. Zimmer
- Board Work Planning – M. Britton
- Statutory Processes – M. Britton, L. Burdett, P. Zimmer, G. Rameka
- Strategic Planning – M. Britton, E. Forch, C. Paton
- World Heritage – UNESCO – M. Britton, E. Forch, T. Wanikau, P. Zimmer, Sir T. Te Heuheu
- Local Government/ Taupo District Council – L. Burdett
- Fish and Game Council Liaison – C. Paton
- Central North Island Sika Foundation – C. Paton
- Conservation Awards Committee – C. Paton, G. Rameka
- Turoa/ Ohakune 2000 Trust, Ohakune Mt Road Pathway Advisory Group– P. Zimmer

5.3 COMMUNITY OF INTEREST REPORTS

Central North Island Sika Foundation

Colin Paton is a member of the steering committee and he reports regularly to the Conservation Board on the work now underway to establish a 'Herd of Special Interest' in the Kaimanawa/Kaiweka Forest Park. The steering committee has been involved in the process to date to have the Sika Deer herd in the Kaimanawa/Kaiweka Forest park declared a 'Herd of Special Interest' provided for by the Game Animal Council Act 2013. The object is to manage the herd under the act to improve both the quality of the animals and the environment they live in. The cost to date and in the future will be met by the *Hunters and the Habitat Club* with the funds generated by the *Sika Show* held annually in September. This year on September 26/27 a stand was manned at the *Sika Show* by steering committee members to gauge the reaction from the hunting fraternity.

6.0 HOW THE BOARD HAS PERFORMED IN ALIGNMENT TO BOARDS RESPONSE LETTER TO ANNUAL LETTER OF EXPECTATION

6.1 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND POLICY – CMS REVIEW, CMS MONITORING, NPMP, DMP, BUSINESS PLANNING

Strategic Planning and Policy Sub-committee

The primary role of a conservation board is the development and monitoring of Conservation Management Strategies (CMS) and management plans. The Tongariro/Taupo Conservation Management Strategy has been operational for 13 years. The Tongariro National Park Management Plan is approaching its 10th birthday. The Board's concern is the review of these plans is unlikely to proceed within three years.

In general, the Board believes provisions in the current CMS are still relevant. However, the Board is concerned implementation of the provisions of the operational CMS is not "driving" the work of the Department of Conservation regionally. Perhaps, a lack of resources to meet the targets within the Strategy, and perhaps a pre-eminence for the Department to prioritise the Statement of Intent

'contract' with the Minister of Conservation and other national priority setting methods, inclusive of Natural Heritage Management Systems (NHMS), reflect this situation. The Board is concerned the protection of the intrinsic values of heritage areas within its advocacy are not being given sufficient weight in the national work plan priority process.

There appears to be some disconnect between the CMS priorities and the Departments budgeting process. Optimally, embracing the still relevant provisions within the CMS and revising outdated aspects to better reflect current priorities (and realities) would facilitate the Board's role of monitoring its implementation to be more relevant and affective.

- Tongariro National Park is an area under significant pressure in terms of visitor use in both winter and summer. The Tongariro Alpine Crossing is an internationally important visitor experience and is facing real challenges in respect of visitor experience and safety.
- The two major ski fields on Mount Ruapehu, particularly Whakapapa, are undergoing new concession application processes where consideration is being given to changes in use and ski field management structure.
- Pressure for new recreational experiences, including the use of mountain bikes in the park, is complicating implementation of park resources and creates some conflict within the current plan. The Board has agreed to a limited review of the plan to consider the construction of a mountain road pathway adjacent to the Ohakune Mountain Road to improve public safety. This process is underway, but this is a bandage covering the ongoing issue of a rapidly outdated management plan.

The Board acknowledges the forthcoming Treaty Settlements affecting its region will have significant and positive implications for the ongoing protection of areas with significant natural and heritage value. The Board looks forward to seeing progress with this process.

6.2 STATUTORY PROCESSES – RMA & CONCESSIONS, RECREATION, HISTORIC & WORKS APPROVALS, SERVICE DELIVERY

Concessions

As required by "concession triggers" for Board notification, consideration was given by the Board for the following concessions:

- **Skotel**

There was an issue of transfer of ownership which was hindered by the short length of concession left or to be provided. The board acknowledged the difficulty the current situation was creating and recommended a longer period be granted.

- **Guiding concession on the Tongariro Alpine Crossing.**

The parking areas, the road to and from the alpine track, and the track itself are congested at peak periods. However at this stage, there was insufficient information regarding capacity of the track and associated infrastructure to recommend that this application for a guiding concession be refused. Therefore, endorsement of the application was given.

➤ **Club Lodges on the Ruapehu, Iwikau Village.**

A representative from a mountain club lodge utilised the public forum meeting provisions to speak with the Board. Their request was to amend the regulation rules to have the opportunity to hire out the club lodge to commercial enterprises during quiet periods. The rules permitting club lodges on the mountain were examined in detail to consider if the request could be permitted. Any decision to alter or interpret the rules to allow commercial use would be unfair to existing commercial accommodation providers. Therefore the board did not recommend any change. The long term situation of the lodges at Iwikau Village will require more consideration by the board in future.

The ongoing financial viability of the mountain club lodges is uncertain with increases to waste water treatment plant upgrades and general compliance costs. Some clubs are experiencing decreasing membership as skiers look for or can afford a different experience.

Resource Management Act

The Board considered and endorsed the application for the upgrade and new resource consent for the Whakapapa waste water treatment plant.

Statutory Processes

The board wrote supportive submissions to the Taupo District Council and Waikato Regional Council Long term plans. The submissions were restricted to those matters within the jurisdiction and interest of the Conservation Board.

6.3 PARTNERSHIPS – COMMUNICATIONS GENERALLY (NOT FUNCTIONALLY) INCLUDING CONSERVATION WEEK

Social gathering of local Authority Members, Taupo

Colin Paton and Geoff 'Snow' Rameka addressed the gathering on behalf of the chairperson of the Conservation Board at a special evening run by DOC and the Conservation Board, to establish lines of communication on 9 April 2015. Unfortunately it was not well supported by local Authority members but those who did attend considered it well worthwhile. We will repeat the exercise again this year but will broaden the list of invitees to include commercial operations who operate in the region.

Wairakei Golf and Sanctuary Takehe Release

Colin Paton attended the ceremonial release of two **Takahe** at the **Wairakei Golf Course and Sanctuary**, on 19 March 2015. This release was taken very seriously by Kaumatua, some of whom travelled from Invercargill. It was a great occasion for the Sanctuary with the support of the local schools and local Authority Staff.

Tūroa te Ao Conservation Awards

In October/November 2014, the Tūroa te Ao - Act for Nature Awards, led by the Tongariro Taupō Conservation Board, and supported by the Department of Conservation Taupō, were re-launched to recognise and celebrate local conservation efforts.

Nominations were called for over a four week period after which time the entries were judged by a Tongariro Taupō Conservation board member and the Taupo King Country Partnership Manager.

An awards evening was held on 7 November 2014 at the new DOC Office in Taupo to celebrate the category winners and the efforts of all nominees.

The Tūroa te Ao - Act for Nature Awards are being run again this year, with nominations opening in September and judging by a three person panel occurring in October.

2014 Conservation Awards Results

Category	Number of Entrants	Award Recipient
Schools	2	Hill Top School 'Weed Busters'
Individuals	4	Nick Singers
Community Groups	6	Te Awa Waitahanui
Business Conservation	2	Wairakei International Golf Course and Sanctuary

6.4 HE KAUPAPA RANGATIRA – MONITOR PROGRESS, APPLY PRINCIPAL VALUES, WANANGA

Geoff 'Snow' Rameka's summary report on the visit to Otukou Marae on 5 December, 2014 begins by explaining that the Otukou marae is the spiritual homeland and base of Ngati Hikairo Iwi. The Tongariro Taupo Conservation were welcomed onto the marae in traditional style by Te Ngaehe Wanikau, John Bishara and members of the Ngati Hikairo whanau.

The focus of this hui was based around the "He Kaupapa Rangatira" aspect of the Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) and of course our roles as board members when confronted with issues connected with kaupapa Maori. As was explained by our hosts and throughout the hui, Ngati Tuwharetoa (and other iwi) have a unique, unchallenged and undeniable relationship with Tongariro National Park (Nga Kahui Maunga). Much discussion was focussed on "getting our heads" around the relationship the Crown (DOC) have with iwi, and understanding their relationship with the environment; including all contained taonga (forests, waterways, mountains etc). For iwi, there has never been a lapse or severing of that relationship; it is time immemorial.

Whilst at times, understanding these views was challenging, it is necessary to try and understand the "indigenous" viewpoint. This is in line with the agreement and understanding of respective iwi authorities. The day ended with a visit to and explanation of the issues associated with Tokaanu Hot Pools as well as a visit to the Tongariro Trout hatchery.

7.0 LIAISON ROLES

7.1 OTHER CONSERVATION BOARDS

Laurie Burdett is the Liaison to the Waikato Conservation Board and attended their meeting held at Waitomo on the 17 February 2015. She provided a written report which summarised the main issues discussed at the Waikato Conservation Board's meeting. They have identified the over fishing of Whitebait as a significant concern and noted some illegal fishing methods are being used

resulting in some prosecutions. However, limited resources created difficulties in monitoring isolated areas. Overall, the Department of Conservation has limited control and more research is needed into the viability of the population. Specifically, the effects over-harvesting of whitebait is having on other stream fauna and the potential long term effects on the whitebait itself.

The Waikato Conservation Board received an excellent presentation on recreation by Tineke Mearns, a technical advisor. In summary, Tineke Mearns illustrated that international research shows that currently there is no discernible link between people accessing and using conservation land and those people developing of a conservation ethic or future interest/involvement in conservation. The need to create a link is established as a high priority, and a strategy is being developed to increase participation, enrich the experience, and manage and promote the conservancy estate with a customer focus.

In acknowledging the shared base of issues, Laurie Burdett spoke to the increased use of the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, the mountain bikes in conservancy estate with special note to use in dual heritage areas, freedom camping and the complexities of site use maintenance and management, the state of the Southern Kaimanawa Forest and the issues being raised in the management of the Sika Deer in the region.

7.2 OTHER ASSOCIATED BOARDS

Fish and Game Council

Liaison Colin Paton attended all meetings of the Eastern Fish and Game Council and found the council running well with good councillor attendance. Of concern to the council is the marked reduction in the Mallard duck population and the country wide research project initiated by Eastern Fish and Game is well underway to establish the cause of the problem. This is an election year for the Eastern Fish and Game. The election will see a change of councillors in some regions. Eastern Fish and Game have appointed a new manager who is doing an excellent job.



The Tongariro Taupo Conservation Board acknowledges with appreciation the photos contributed to this document by Bernadine Snowden Rameka, Department of Conservation.

With thanks from Tongariro Taupo Conservation Board 2015