Management practice for allocation of recreation concessions

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CONTENTS

Abstract

This review examines concession management systems within and outside New Zealand, including discussion of examples in parks with high visitor use. Information on concession and recreation planning was collected from DOC literature and staff, key international contacts, and a search of internet and library resources. Results show that other countries are having similar problems in allocating concessions and in setting limits to environmental and social impacts. No established method or process was identified that DOC could adopt, but actions could be implemented which would aid development of an improved DOC concession system.

Two overall recommendations are:

- Visitor management could be improved by integrating concession management with recreation planning. Following a spectrum of service concept, recreation planners could consider what visitor services are required, what conditions should apply, then assess who is the best to provide that service, and if a concession is the preferred choice, a tender offered.
- Concession system could be improved by DOC becoming more proactive in the allocation of concession opportunities, and in collecting and using information about visitor numbers, visitor use and resource conditions.

Problems blamed on concession management at high-use sites are often symptomatic of the wider problem of optimising the provision of visitor services in parks. In some areas, the impact of visitors using commercial operators is lower than that of independent visitors. Concessionaires, while clearly a part of many visitor use issues, are more easily managed due to the legislative and policy provisions in New Zealand's statutory framework for managing public lands.

1. Introduction

A Department of Conservation (DOC) concession is an official authorisation for commercial organisations to operate in an area managed by the Department. A concession may be in the form of a lease, licence, permit or easement:

- A permit is for less than 5 years, and confers no interest in the land.
- A licence is for more than 5 years, and confers a non-exclusive interest in the land.
- A lease means exclusive land use.
- An easement is the right to use land for passage.

Concessions are required for: accommodation facilities; water, air or land transport services, commercial education or instruction activities; guiding (including fishing, hunting, tramping, walking, climbing/ski tours, kayaking/ canoeing); skifields; attractions such as bungy jumping; and services such as shops, tearooms, restaurants, garages, or hire services.

Visitor pressure on conservation areas is increasing. DOC wants to develop a methodology that will establish when to allow or restrict concessions, and under what conditions. Some of the questions that are included in this broad information need include:

- How many concessions to allow?
- What operating conditions to include?
- How to measure concessionaire activity and impacts?
- How to distinguish concessionaire impacts from general public impacts?
- What criteria to use to set fees?

Using a literature review approach based on library and internet resources, and consultation with overseas contacts, the objective of this report is to:

- Describe current DOC concession management and recreation planning.
- Identify methods and examples of concession management and recreation planning in high-use parks outside New Zealand.
- Examine overseas concession and recreation planning strengths and weaknesses.
- Suggest the possible application of alternative concession methodologies and recreation systems for DOC's concession management needs.

2. Theory

2.1 'THE TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS'

The increasing number of visitors to conservation areas is a recent example of Hardin's (1968) analysis of communal use of public resources, 'The Tragedy of the Commons'. Hardin used the example of herdsmen sharing village lands to graze cattle. At some stage, a herdsman would choose to add additional privately owned cattle to graze the community's grass, increasing private profit. Ultimately the level of grazing would not be sustainable and all users of the communal asset would suffer. Hardin's solution was to impose government controls to limit access to the commons or to privatise common-pool resources, and, above all, to limit the population.

While Hardin believed that ruin was inevitable without coercive population control, recent works by a range of interdisciplinary scientists have identified systems and institutions that in some cases use selected resources sustainably, at least on local scales. The traditional theory regarding resource users as unbridled appropriators is being replaced by the recognition that users can communicate and co-operate when it is in their interest to do so, when the resources are at their disposal, and when the socio-political context permits it.

Burger and Gochfield (1998) reviewed the Hardin thesis. They give recent examples of 'commons challenges' including fisheries, public land use and air quality. They concluded that four properties must exist for co-operative management to be feasible:

- The resources have not been depleted beyond hope of recovery.
- There are reliable indicators of resource condition.
- Trends in resource quality and quantity are sufficiently predictable.
- The distribution of the resource is sufficiently localised to be studied and controlled by one political entity.

New Zealand's seawater fisheries fit the Burger and Gochfield (1998) properties: the marine resource is not completely depleted; there are indicators; fish are reasonably predictable; and the New Zealand fisheries area is defined and can be controlled. The current resource allocation framework uses tradable quota for commercial fishers, daily limits for recreational fishers, minimum sizes, different net sizes and times suitable for each coastal fishing area, and strict monitoring and evaluation.

Significant 'wins' resulting from the marine quota system include, for example, the voluntary reduction in take in the Fiordland lobster industry to increase future yield (by increasing the base breeding population)[1]. Since quota are owned as commercial assets, and their value is based on market rates, quota

[1] The rock lobster industry voluntarily reduced its quota from 888 tonnes in the 1998/99 fishing year, to 710 tonnes in the 1999/00 year. The intention is to improve stock numbers to allow a maximum sustainable yield of 14,000 tonnes within 13 years. Similar efforts are being undertaken by the paua and oyster industries.

holders can increase their annual income from increased resource yield as well as the capital value of their quota. As a result, they are forced to adopt a long-term view of resource management and sustainability. Such voluntary actions are co-ordinated by the Ministry of Fisheries and independent stakeholder groups that represent quota holders with common interests in one or more fish species and locations.

New Zealand's conservation areas share similar base properties:

- Conservation areas are not depleted beyond recovery.
- Indicators of resource condition have been investigated. American cases have developed indicators through Limits to Acceptable Change (LAC) studies. Lincoln University is carrying out domestic research on visitor indicators.
- Impacts on conservation areas are reasonably predictable.
- Conservation areas are small enough to be studied and controlled.

Unlike fisheries, the predominant use of conservation areas is public, rather than commercial. Like fisheries, potential tools to reduce visitor use may prove difficult as some individuals will feel unfairly penalised. Conservation managers need to address a number of important questions when dealing with resource allocation for different types of visitors:

- What effects do different visitors have on the park environment, and other park users?
- Can the effects be minimised by controlling visitors in different ways?
- What different management principles should apply to commercial and non-commercial activities?
- Can the numbers, activities and behaviours of visitors be controlled—and how?
- To what degree will visitors accept those controls?

Access can be managed by agreed rights and rules, which are uniformly adhered to and enforced. As long as the rules are sound, adherence is universal, and the community governs wisely, the resource will not be depleted and the situation could be considered sustainable. The questions remain:

- What statutory and management mechanisms are available to manage impacts?
- Who is to be restricted?
- What benefits are gained?
- What is the level of community interest in restricting access?

2.2 METHODS FOR IDENTIFYING RESOURCE CAPACITIES

Most land management agencies use a licensing system to authorise commercial organisations to operate on publicly or privately owned land. Agencies employ a variety of strategies and philosophies for permitting commercial activities and managing their impacts on parks and protected areas.

While there is no internationally standardised concession award assessment system, several recreation planning tools for outdoor recreation management are frequently referred to. The most common frameworks used in comparable park management systems elsewhere include: Needs Assessment, the Recreation Opportunities Spectrum (ROS), Limits to Acceptable Change (LAC), Visitor Impact Management (VIM), and Visitor Experience and Resource Management (VERP).

Needs Assessments, as used by the US Forest Service, are a formalised and proactive way of determining appropriate recreational activities, including those provided using commercial recreation providers. This is usually carried out over five steps:

1. Define the desired condition
2. Measure the existing condition
3. Identify the limiting conditions
4. Consider potential activities
5. Determine appropriate activities

LAC, VIM and VERP are recreation planning systems that focus on ecological impacts and crowding. Specific reference to these systems is made in the relevant case studies in this report.

LAC is grounded in recreation ecology research, where 'results are more important than regulations' (McGivney 1999). The LAC approach involves extensive participation observation and the survey of the opinions of visitors and the public. Chris Monz (in McGivney 1999) who is a research scientist for the National Outdoor Leadership School, compares the LAC process to a zoning plan for a city, comparable to ROS. Concerned members of the public attend focus groups to decide which areas should remain as wilderness and which should receive concentrated use. Agreement is reached on measurable indicators of impact—the width of track or the number of campsites—and those factors are monitored. The LAC process is a means of resolving conflict between opposing goals. The notion of compromise is a core outcome.

Common elements of LAC and other planning tools such as VIM and VERP are:

- Assessment of the condition of the natural environment
- Visitor demand assessment
- Public consultation

All involve the need to set specific management objectives for the places, which then guide managers on what is appropriate or not—which in turn may also guide what levels and conditions of use are appropriate (including concession use).

3. DOC Practice

3.1 CONCESSION PROCESSING

DOC has a standardised concession processing system. Concessions policies and procedures are available on the DOC Intranet, and common forms are used. Specialist staff based in conservancy offices carry out most concession assessment work. Minor concessions can be processed and approved at area offices while major concessions require national level input. Inter-conservancy concessions are co-ordinated by one office. Information about concessions is recorded on a national computer database. The system works on a cost-recovery basis with time spent on a concession being charged to the concessionaire. Most concession applications are initiated by an individual or firm seeking permission to run a particular business. Environmental Assessments are required with each concession application. Occasionally some concession opportunities are publicly tendered by DOC. However, the numerous existing policies and procedures do not assist staff in determining if a concession application will exceed the capacities of the sites to be visited.

Perceived weaknesses of the DOC concession system include:

- It is too reactive—it relies on external pressure rather than a considered strategy.
- It is driven and restricted by legislation.
- It does not provide guidance on when to stop issuing permits (when capacity is reached).
- There are inconsistencies (perceived and real) in applying for and negotiating concessions between conservancies and concessionaires.
- Some concessionaires adopt an adversarial role with DOC.
- Links to recreation planning are inconsistent.

In most cases, DOC sets limits on the number of visitors and trips available to concessionaires. In some areas DOC has placed moratoriums on concession approvals until there is information to indicate such use is sustainable.

DOC's recreation planning system is guided by several 'strategy level' documents:

- A national visitor strategy
- Other national visitor policies and procedures (available on the DOC Intranet)
- VAMS (Visitor Asset Management System)
- Conservation Management Plans (10 year Conservancy plans)
- Annual Conservancy business plans

None of these documents set defined limits on visitor impacts. The statutory right of access to national parks limits this opportunity.

3.2 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS

DOC requires concession applicants to include an Environmental Assessment in their proposal. However, Environmental Assessments rarely provide enough information about the proposal to allow DOC to clearly identify whether it is sustainable or not. Like the Tragedy of the Commons concept, an individual concession activity is often unlikely to produce unacceptable impacts. If considered cumulatively, however, with all the other existing and potential visitors, the proposal may exceed a sustainable level of activity. However, what level of activity constitutes 'sustainable' is not defined.

Three standard approaches are frequently adopted when the level of impact—social or environmental—is unclear.

1. A proposal for a new commercial activity may be regarded as the 'thin edge of the wedge'. While the proposal itself might have limited and controllable impacts, any additional activities in the area may be unacceptable. In the absence of any pre-set limits to visitor impacts, the potentially viable proposal is rejected.
2. Alternatively, a set of concessions for the same or similar activities will have been issued for an area some time in the past. While the level of impact of these activities is unquantified, they are considered to be acceptable since they represent the status quo (often the 'do nothing' option) and commercial operators have sunk risk capital into the business opportunity. Further applications for concession activity must show that any additional impacts are within acceptable boundaries. Since no research has been undertaken to identify the current level of impact or the acceptable boundaries, the new applicant must carry the costs of a full research programme and is often unwilling to carry the burden. The 'first in, first served' rule continues to apply, and this is defended by the incumbents to protect their investments.
3. The lack of any standards may encourage a 'suck it and see' approach, where the activity is permitted but monitoring is required to ensure impacts are acceptable and limited. The activity will be allowed to grow until concerns are identified. In some cases, additional applications for the same activity in the same site can create tensions and the second approach, above, comes into play.

Few examples are available of Environmental Assessments being undertaken to pre-establish acceptable levels of concession activity. Those that do exist, such as Helicopter landings within the Mount Cook National Park, are limited to activities that are almost solely undertaken by commercial operators. Where commercial and independent activities are mixed, such as sea kayaking around Abel Tasman National Park and guided walking in Fiordland, the issue is muddied. This is further exacerbated by different activities interacting in confined areas.

3.3 DOC CASE STUDIES

Helicopter concessions and Mount Cook National Park

A discussion paper (DOC 1996) and following report (Regional Conservator 1996) resulted in the park being divided into zones based on physical and social characteristics. Recommendations were made on appropriate helicopter use. A ROS/LAC approach was used and a specified number of landings at specific locations were tendered. Monitoring information will be used in the next allocation period to decide to decrease or increase the number of landing quota.

Concession monitoring in Southland Conservancy

Dodson and Lind (1996) comprehensively documented concession monitoring by DOC's Southland Conservancy. The report highlights the range of monitoring options available, and the difficulties and costs associated with developing a concession monitoring system.

Abel Tasman National Park

Abel Tasman National Park is an example of high visitor use and increasing concession pressure.

'Controlling the number of people who use the Abel Tasman National Park's beaches is a more important issue than the question of who manages the foreshore, says Nelson Mayor Paul Matheson.

...

'Mr Matheson said the 11 new concessions issued at the start of last summer did nothing for the management of the park and he questioned why so many were issued when an overuse problem was looming'

(Anonymous 2000a).

TABLE 1. CONCESSION AND INDEPENDENT VISITOR NUMBERS IN ABEL TASMAN NATIONAL PARK.

	DAY VISITORS (PER YEAR)	OVERNIGHT VISITORS (PER YEAR)	TOTAL VISITORS (PER YEAR)
Concession visitors	5,592	2,870	8,462
Independent visitors	144,400	31,130	175,538
Total	150,000	34,000	184,000
% concession visitors	4%	8%	5%
No of concessions*	26	7	31
Average number/per concession	215	410	273
% of independent visitors	96%	92%	95%

* 2 concessions operate day and overnight activities

In the summer of 1999/2000 various visitor impacts in Abel Tasman National Park were reported, especially toilet problems at road-ends, campsites and huts. Suggested solutions included continuing to upgrade the toilet systems and restricting access by concessionaires. Recent kayak concession approvals have been more restrictive than previous concession permits.

Questions have been raised regarding how the sites and concessions can be managed, since it is perceived that the number of concessions is related to impacts.

The best available estimate of current annual visitor numbers to Abel Tasman National Park is 184,000 (Abel Tasman National Park including Totaranui campground and Marahau carpark). There are 31 concessionaires taking approximately 8,500 visitors to the Park. Analysis of visitor numbers by concession/independent and day/overnight is shown in Table 1.

Concession visitors make up 5% of all visitors to Abel Tasman National Park. With this low proportion of concession visitors, it is logical to look at what other issues are contributing to visitor over-use at the Park:

- Visitor numbers have been steadily increasing at about 5% annually for the last 10 years.
- A hut booking system implemented in 1999 affected overnight use.
- The Tasman District Council manages the Abel Tasman coastal waters. Issues along the coast include:
  - — Increasing commercial boat transport to the park (operators do not require a DOC concession as they do not operate in the park).
  - — Increasing independent boat access and use of the coast, and conflict between water activities, e.g. kayak/motor boats. Most boats are launched from the southern end of the park: Marahau, Kaiteriteri, and Motueka and even from Nelson.
  - — Bottlenecks for commercial operators occur outside the park. For example, parking of boat and kayak trailers at Marahau.

Concessionaires account for the minority of visitors to Abel Tasman National Park and restrictions on concessions will not alone lessen the impacts. Over-regulating concession activities could be considered an inefficient management technique. Many visitors who currently use a commercial service would still visit the park if commercial options were not available. However, concessions are commonly regarded as the one thing that DOC can easily manage, and are therefore the target of criticism (that is, DOC has issued too many concessions).

The real issue is that the total number of visitors has increased beyond the facility capacity. Concessions are seen as an opportunity for control. But problems blamed on concession management are symptoms of the bigger problem of optimising visitor recreation and tourism experiences in natural areas. Options for management include modifying visitor timing (for example, via the hut booking system), modifying visitor expectations, attracting visitors to alternative sites, or increasing the capacity of facilities such as toilets.

4. International practice

4.1 UNITED STATES

The USA has two major public outdoor recreation providers: the National Park Service (Department of the Interior) and the US Forest Service, Department of Agriculture (Bureau of Land Management). LAC and Needs Assessments are being applied in the US Forest Service and VIM and VERP are being applied sporadically in the National Park Service.

America uses different concession terminology than New Zealand: concessions apply to such activities as hospitality business food and accommodation in public areas, while guided activities, such as rafting, are offered by 'outfitters'.

The National Park Service and the US Forest Service allow not-for-profit organisations, such as Scouts, to have special facilities (accommodation lodges and camps) in national parks. In many American parks, Park Rangers offer guided walks and talks, while guided walks and talks in New Zealand are only normally available from a concession operation.

USA Concession Review

American concession and outfitting legislation in national parks was revised between 1995 and 1998. The old legislation was criticised from both commercial operators and the wider public.

Operators felt that:

- The legislation was opposed to commercial activities.
- Applications were too costly in time and money to produce.
- Returns were required at inappropriate times (mid-season, for example).

Other commentators (in O'Connell 1995, Palmeri 1995) considered that:

- Concession fees were too low (average 2.8% of ticket price in 1993). The percentage was low compared with those in the USA private sector and other government departments (for example, army and air force bases). The low fee was blamed on lack of open bidding.
- Fee revenue was not being used to support the park but was returned to the general treasury.
- Incumbent concessionaires were favoured. Incumbents reserved considerable rights of renewal. Where contracts were not renewed, the park service was required to compensate operators for the capital improvements lost, the value of which was often inflated.

Compared with the USA, DOC concessions are tougher in being more restrictive in the scale of facilities built by concessionaires (large-scale hotels, restaurants and shopping) and DOC fees are higher.

Setting concession limits in USA

Limits are usually based on historical use from both independent and commercial operators. In some parks, managers use a quota system for

independent outfitters. McGivney (1998) provides three examples of unfair quota cases:

- In White Mountain District of Inyo National Forest in California it is alleged numbers of backpackers are restricted while commercial horsepackers are granted unlimited access.
- In the Grand Canyon National Park visitors can pay a commercial outfitter and raft the Colorado River within a year. Independent rafters and kayakers must join 6,700 others in a queue that stretches for 15 years. In the Grand Canyon case, 60% of the visitor quota is commercial.
- Commercial outfitters are not using all the permits they hold. Wilderness Watch (a non-profit advocacy group in Missoula, Montana, USA) research shows that outfitters and guides in Forest Service wilderness areas use only 65% of the 727,000 permit days they were allocated in 1995.

4.1.1 USA case studies

There are many case studies of the application of LAC in the USA, but few which mention concessions. In the following pages, six case studies that cover both concessions and a standard planning methodology are described, key points raised and relevance to New Zealand highlighted.

Mt Hood Forest

In the Mt Hood National Forest (Oregon), Environment Assessment procedures rely on the LAC approach (Walker & Slagle 1998). One of the eight purposes of this approach was to identify an appropriate number of outfitter opportunities considering public demand and need. A standard was required to balance outfitter and general public recreation within wilderness areas.

The proposed management actions included:

- A limited use permit for day trampers, overnight users and outfitters.
- Designated campsites in high-use destinations.
- Campfire restrictions in high-elevation areas.
- The use of pelletized feed for livestock (horse-trekking).

The report highlighted that higher levels of social impact were acceptable during holidays and weekends.

A series of workshops were held and newsletters distributed to raise public awareness of wilderness policies and public participation in the development of issues, alternatives and management actions. Issues raised by the public regarding limiting public use included:

- *Wilderness use restrictions* Some members of the public were concerned about potential use restrictions. They felt they could be excluded from a favourite destination and it would reduce the spontaneity of their trips—especially day walks. They felt it was inconvenient to travel to get a permit. Some were concerned about the administrative details of a permit system: the fairness of getting a permit, the cost involved, the complications and proliferation of fees. A permit system was felt to be regulatory and reduced independent and unfettered use. They also felt it could undermine public support for wilderness. In general the public was more supportive for limits resulting from unacceptable resource impacts than from trying to reduce social interactions.

- *Wilderness Use Displacement* Demand for wilderness use is expected to increase along with the expanding Portland metro population. There are not many similar walking tracks within one to two hours of Portland. Displacement could result in other, more pristine areas, having increased impacts and reduced opportunities for solitude.
- *South Side Climb* Climbers, managers and search and rescue organisations were concerned that displacement as a result of limiting climbing use could result in more climbing search and rescue operations. Climbers may venture out in marginal weather or try more advanced routes because permits for the easier routes were all reserved.
- *Administration of a limited use permit system* Wilderness managers are concerned about the cost of implementing and administering a limited use permit system and other management actions in the face of declining budgets.

Bob Marshall Wilderness

LAC has been used for recreation planning in the Bob Marshall, Great Bear, and Scapegoat Wildernesses, Montana (Warren 1998). The Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex Recreation Management Plan aimed to answer 'how much use is too much?' It describes the resource conditions that are permitted to occur in an area, while de-emphasising appropriate use levels. The LAC process provided a consistent framework and methodology for managers to gather, at least, the minimum level of monitoring information for visitor encounters, campsite conditions, and aircraft landings.

The Recreation Management Directory prescribes inventory and monitoring requirements and specific minimum resource condition standards, as follows:

Inventories and monitoring:

1. Determine overall use patterns, activities and levels
2. Conduct an extensive social survey
3. Inventory track conditions
4. Determine range trend and condition

Resource condition standards:

5. Track, campsite, and river encounters with other parties
6. Number of human impacted sites
7. Occurrences of litter on Wild and Scenic Riverbanks
8. Wild and Scenic River recreation user experience quality
9. Encounters with other float parties at Schafer Meadows
10. Forage utilisation
11. Aircraft landings at Schafer Meadows airstrip

When reviewed, managers expressed concern with their limited ability to obtain data that quantified resource and social conditions. Much of the monitoring information collected did not have a rigorous statistical sampling design. This limited the managers' ability to use and interpret the data and reach conclusions.

The LAC process provided a list of management actions that could be implemented to:

- Reduce human impacted site density
- Reduce unacceptable site conditions or impacts
- Improve range conditions
- Reduce the number of aircraft landings

Education programmes have been the main action taken. Some issues have not been resolved, including determination of the appropriate levels of outfitter-provided recreational services, wildlife population goals, water quality standards, communication needs and administrative site needs.

Other issues have risen since the plan was approved including the spread of noxious weeds and bears taking human food. Since the plan was approved in 1990, managers and the LAC work group continue to meet to monitor results, identify new issues, and gain a common understanding of possible management actions needed to maintain the desired conditions described by the plan.

Visitor information was analysed. In 1986, visitor use was estimated at 207,000 visitor days per year. In 1982, their methods of travel were:

- 57% hiked
- 36% on horseback
- 3% hiked with packstock
- 3% rafted
- 1% other

Of the visits by horseback, 36% were with an outfitter.

In 1996 managers estimated that there were 191,000 visitor days. Outfitters were allocated 30,000 visitor days, of which an average of 18,200 visitor days was actually used. Of the outfitter actual use, 56% was associated with autumn hunting parties, 44% with summer roving pack and float trips and less than 1% with tramping and non-stock use.

Outfitters, while not using the full allocation as set in the 1980 plan, are requesting a review on expanding and offering new outfitting and guiding services.

Monitoring has shown that impacts are increasing at some sites. Managers are attempting to resolve resource impact problems while addressing the desire to facilitate recreational use by the general and outfitted public. The public was involved through 15 separate meetings. These were held to establish a common understanding of the current situation, solicit information and opinions, and identify possible solutions.

Issues and concerns raised were:

- Sites had conditions which do not meet LAC minimum standards.
- Only the minimum necessary regulations should be used.
- The outfitting and guiding industry should have more flexibility in providing for recreational use opportunities.
- Historical patterns and methods of outfitter and guide use should be maintained.

- Areas within one day's travel from popular road-ends need to be managed to reduce crowding.
- Increase the number of campsites suitable for a 14 day stay with pack and saddle stock that are not occupied by an outfitter autumn base camp.
- Some additional autumn outfitting base camp locations need to be available if a prescribed natural fire or wildfire requires a camp to be moved for safety reasons.

The following management actions were developed.

Considerations for wilderness conditions:

1. Retain the indicators and standards for conditions in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex Recreation Management Plan.
2. Establish new LAC indicators and standards for winter use.

Considerations for recreation management:

1. Install temporary hitchrails for the general public at selected bottleneck sites.
2. Limit group size to the current level of 15 people and reduce livestock numbers from the current 35 animals per group.
3. Require firepans or fire blankets for all open fires.
4. Restrict pack and saddle stock grazing before summer in problem areas.
5. Limit livestock use to current levels for outfitters, and possibly for all recreational-use activities, unless it is projected that additional use will not degrade trail, site and vegetation conditions.
6. Eliminate some outfitter autumn hunting base camps in congested and easily accessible areas.
7. Inventory outfitter developed access tracks and evaluate their effects.
8. Issue institutional outfitter permits on a limited basis if it is determined that the use would not degrade track, site and vegetation conditions.
9. Continue to emphasise 'Leave No Trace' wilderness education programmes.

Alternatives will be developed through additional public involvement. An Environmental Assessment will review the impacts of the proposed actions and alternatives, and the public will continue to be involved.

The LAC process in this case provided a framework for public involvement, emphasis on describing the conditions that are permitted, and the avoidance of rigid regulatory use limits. Weaknesses shown in the Bob Marshall case include the long lead-time for the process and the essential requirement for accurate visitor and environmental input early in the planning.

Nantahala River

Tarrant and English (1996) followed the LAC framework and developed a crowding-based model of social carrying capacity of users on the Nantahala River in North Carolina. The river receives about 200,000 users annually.

A survey of white-water users canvassed 347 commercial guided boaters, 873 commercial non-guided boaters, 28 independent rafters and 222 independent canoers/kayakers, and asked about their reactions to crowding. Results indicate that independent and weekend users perceived greater levels of crowding compared with commercial or weekday users, when other variables are held

constant. Applications of the results can be used to set maximum commercial use at levels that would be expected to generate acceptable crowding ratings.

The findings also indicated that commercial visitors perceive lower crowding levels than do independent visitors. There appeared to be an unequal trade-off between commercial and independent users regarding their impact on crowding perceptions. Allowing an additional 100 independent users means reducing commercial use by between 200 and 260 people.

Arches National Park

Arches National Park has established a pilot of the VERP system as documented by Wilkinson (1995). It was selected because of its high increase in visitation over the last decade and its specialised environment of sandstone arches and fragile plant communities, which are threatened. It was estimated that 80% of the native plant communities close to the park's icon arches are deteriorating, and also 20 % of the wilderness arches (far away from the nearest road). The trampling of vegetation is the cause.

VERP

- Establishes a range of management zones that are designed to deliver differing degrees of solitude and visitor services.
- Sets inviolate thresholds that protect the physical and scenic environment.
- Supports the process with hard data.

VERP is designed to encourage a change in attitude from merely expanding infrastructure to accommodate increases in patronage. Such moves are considered to exacerbate aesthetic, biological and social problems. VERP is considered to give managers 'a basis for making tough decisions'.

In the past, the process for decision making had been attacked. The Arches VERP programme began with three objectives:

- Re-examination of the legislation to gain a feel for the original purpose of the park.
- The completion of a biological inventory to identify certain plants or animals that could serve as indicators of change.
- The survey of visitors to gain an accurate reading of their expectations.

Visitors were shown photographs with various numbers of people in each picture and were asked to rate them on a scale of acceptability. Thresholds of crowding acceptability were established beyond which experiences would be eroded. Visitors were also asked about methods of limiting visitation.

The benefit of the VERP process is considered to be its defensible nature – limits are not arbitrarily defined by 'management', and it is not based upon what some perceive to be the agenda of elitist conservation groups.

Four years after the VERP system began, Arches had amassed a large database on visitor attitudes about overcrowding. Managers realised that carparks enticed large crowds and had a direct impact on the condition of biological and aesthetic resources. If they limited the number of vehicles, they could effectively regulate the number of people in delicate sites (without limiting the number of people entering the park).

The Arches National Park VERP programme was considered a small-scale project (a 'shoestring' budget of US$400,000 and a planning team of six).

Snake River

In 1997 a proposal of managing outfitter and institutional use of the Snake River in Wyoming was publicly distributed (including by the internet—Environmental Assessment 5/11/97). The document contains a description of the current system (a permit is required). Existing problems included increasing outfitter use, and conflicts between float fishing, rafting and canoeing. Crowding and queues at the boatramps and carparks were a major issue. The analysis began in 1994, and in 1997 issues, alternatives and environmental consequences were available for outfitter and public comment. Updated information on the success of the project was not found on the internet.

Yosemite National Park

Watkins (1995) described Yosemite National Park:

'At the height of its summer season, human and vehicular congestion and commercial gimmickry turns Yosemite's once incomparably beautiful valley floor into something more reminiscent of Disneyworld gotten out of hand than one of the principal jewels in the diadem of the National Park System'.

Private cars were unmanageable and visitor numbers had risen to 4.2 million annually, but no management plans had been implemented. Park administrators knew that crowding and congestion were seriously affecting park resources. A Yosemite General Master Plan which had been produced 10 years earlier had few of its recommendations introduced and many believed the Yosemite was overdeveloped.

In 1997 a flood demolished hundreds of structures and buildings including employee housing, visitor accommodation, campgrounds, roads, bridges, toilets and sewer lines. This gave the Park Service an opportunity to rethink development in the park (Clarke 1999). A key issue was visitor traffic and a proposal for parking private cars outside the park and then using a concession bus service to transport visitors between sites within the park. Planning continues.

While management had been ineffective, nature had quickly removed many of the controversial concessionaire facilities linked with over-development in Yosemite National Park.

4.1.2 Critique

Visitor education and voluntary compliance with codes of conduct is often the resulting preferred management technique in the USA. If voluntary compliance does not work then a permit/quota system is the next option.

However, managers with LAC-based management plans have rarely followed through with instituting a permit system when too many visitors access an area. For example, the number and condition of campsites in Montana's Bob Marshall Wilderness has exceeded the LAC plan for more than a decade, but little beyond visitor education programmes has been instituted.

In Montana there is much pressure to protect resources, but the culture is against restricting use. Visitors do not report eroded tracks or degraded campsites as problems. The imposition of limits is required but land managers are reluctant.

It is reported that this reluctance to implement restrictions is partly the result of the short tenure of many park managers.

David Cole in McGivney (1999) says:

'Good wilderness management often involves restricting access, and that needs public support. Park visitors need to decide where they want to draw the line between having a pristine wilderness experience and enjoying freedom of access'.

USA recreation planning systems such as LAC and VIM, VERP are slow and expensive but they do provide a public participation process and guidance to set monitoring standards and the collection of visitor information. Objective data for internal and external discussion is essential for recreation management. Frequently, recommendations are not implemented.

The US National Park Service has been criticised for neglecting the science necessary for good land management (Kaiser 2000). A new plan aims to bolster research in the parks by investing several million dollars in cataloguing species, monitoring park conditions (air and water quality), hiring trained managers and enticing academics to conduct research in parks. The goal is to enable managers to anticipate environmental problems rather than lurch from crisis to crisis. If this initiative is completed it may provide useful information in monitoring park conditions relevant to visitor impacts and recreation management.

American examples show that while resource managers are very interested in limiting the environmental impacts of visitors (commercial or independent) in high profile sites, and often complete in-depth resource studies, they are frequently reluctant to impose limitations on visitor numbers. This is mostly due to public pressure for the retention of freedom of access.

4.2 CANADA

Canada has similar visitor pressure in national parks as New Zealand and USA.

Banff National Park

Ritchie (1999) reported the findings of a major study designed to formulate policy recommendations for the long-term protection and development of Banff National Park—one of Canada's most internationally known tourism destination and environmental protection areas. The new management plan includes a proposed freeze on community development and the removal of inappropriate tourism facilities.

The Banff-Bow Valley is located in the Rocky Mountains and is considered special because of its rare montane ecosystem and prime wildlife habitat, especially in winter. Its majestic scenery attracts more than 5 million visitors annually, and it has 5,600 hotel rooms, 60 restaurants and 175 speciality shops.

More than 1,300 businesses are licensed to operate in the park. The population of Banff is approximately 7,600 and that of Lake Louise is 1,560.

The study, formally known as the Banff-Bow Valley Study, was an undertaking that took more than two years and cost over CDN$2.4 million. It involved an extensive public participation process designed to seek the views of Canadians. The study sought to bring a balanced perspective to an ongoing debate between environmental protection and those wanting economic gain. The study also examined the interface between the two factions with a view to providing recommendations that would both permit and foster ongoing co-operation. The study used Interest-Based Negotiation (along with traditional programmes) to consult with the public, asking them to share in the responsibility for making decisions about their national parks—based on their 'interest' rather than their 'positions'. Fourteen interest sectors were identified. The outcome of the work was three sets of recommendations:

- Those related to steps to maintain and/or restore the ecological integrity of the region.
- To enhance Banff's appeal as a tourism destination in a manner consistent with maintaining ecological integrity.
- To enhance the overall effectiveness of park governance and management.

An additional observation by Ritchie was that the general public appeared to have little appreciation for, and understanding of, the seriousness of ecological degradation in a setting where, to the untrained eye, nothing appears to be wrong. This is a major practical concern for policy makers whose science demonstrates that a problem exists. It also poses a theoretical concern in evaluating public information.

Key Points shown in the Banff case are:

- Like the USA, there were concession problems linked to the large-scale concession facilities (accommodation and hospitality) located in the park.
- A more integrated planning approach for the area included concession activities.
- The public is not good at perceiving environmental damage.

4.3 AUSTRALIA

Each Australian state and territory operates a different concession system. There has been a recent move to co-ordinate the treatment of concession and commercial activities.

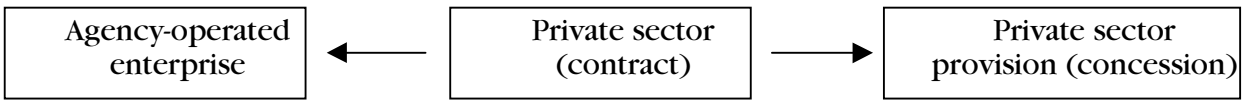
In 1999 Peter Egan from the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission co-ordinated a best practice management for the delivery of commercial park services for the ANZECC (Australia and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council) Standing Committee on National Parks and Protected Area Management. ANZECC provides a forum for member Governments to exchange information and experience, and to develop co-ordinated policies in relation to national and international environment and conservation issues. The Commercial Park services project team was made up from representatives from

each of the Australian states and territories and from New Zealand (Harry Maher from DOC was the New Zealand representative).

The most relevant points raised in the ANZECC Commercial practice report applying to managing concessions include:

- Use the same standards for concessions as the agency applies to its own services and facilities.
- Licensing policy should be consistent and logical output of higher policy.
- Be clear about why to licence. Is it to determine levels and patterns of park use, raise revenue, manage risk or to ensure appropriate standards are met?
- Understand the relationship with agency and concessionaire. Is it competitor, partner or business client?
- Proactive concession management by tendering can be used to encourage a particular use pattern. Concessions can provide a management tool with which to direct the demand for park areas and contribute to the optimisation of use of facilities while minimising impact.
- Staff should fully understand why an agency licenses, and implement accordingly and impartially.
- Exclusive or semi-exclusive licensing is a powerful tool for limiting change to the environment or the recreational setting. Applying restrictive licensing to hinder legitimate park activity is poor practice. When limiting licence opportunities, calling for public tenders or for expressions of interest works well.

The ANZECC report included a business management model for identifying the spectrum of service provision. This showed three options for managing services:



Private sector services can be described as those commercial or value-added services that are essential to core business but which agencies choose to have the private sector provide. The approach to private sector provided services is often a philosophical one or it may be one of government policy. DOC uses contractors currently and such use is probably increasing (maintenance of recreation facilities is often planned by DOC and the work is carried out by contractors on-site).

Being proactive is essential to using the service provision model.

The ANZECC project developed a preferred model for awarding leases and concessions. The ANZECC model provides a methodology that combines proactive and reactive concession planning. A summary of the ANZECC Commercial Management best practice model is shown in Table 2. An extended version of this method is shown in the Appendix.

TABLE 2. SUMMARY ANZECC COMMERCIAL MANAGEMENT PRACTICE MODEL.

	Authority	
	↓ Policy	
Industry/Agency input →	↓ Business/Park plan	← Community input
	↓ Validate opportunity	
Advertisement →	↓ Concession opportunity	← Agency initiative(s) and industry/agency inquiry
Cashflow forecasts →	↓ Application	
	↓ Assessment all categories	
Simple concession	↓ Complex concession	Lease
	↓ Approval	
	↓ Monitor and review	→ Termination
	↓ Renewal	

Queensland

The Queensland State Government is in the early stages of investigating issues that are considered to constrain the development of a commercially viable and ecologically sustainable tourism industry based on the State's extensive protected area network of national parks, state forests and marine parks. In mid 1999 a steering committee of Government department representatives (parks, tourism and commerce) considered the key issues constraining tourism on protected areas to be:

1. The issue and regulation of permits for commercial operations is generally based on an outdated system that does not reflect contemporary business practice or commercial realities.
2. Industry concern about perceived inequity between charges levied on commercial tour operators for access to and operation within protected areas and the free access regime enjoyed by non-commercial users.
3. Issues of native title, the uncertainty surrounding the legislation and the perception that native title issues take a long time to settle.

4. Government expenditure on essential visitor management and associated infrastructure such as roads, bridges, walking tracks etc., is seen as minimal.
5. Industry believes protected area management agencies need to be more innovative and investigate alternative means of generating additional revenue.
6. In the face of declining government expenditure, the issues of providing infrastructure on public land and of industry operators making a fair contribution to the cost of park infrastructure and management need to be resolved.
7. Lack of co-ordination and co-operation between Government agencies (particularly in regard to administrative and policy matters), between the various industry sectors and between Government and industry is impeding an integrated resolution of many of the above issues
8. The issue of effective enforcement of permit conditions and non-permitted operations, and a resolve to revoke permits for non-compliance, are essential elements in any system of commercial tourism management, particularly one aimed at promoting best practice.
9. The issue of the growing incidence of protected area management agencies being both regulators/licensors and operators/providers of nature based tourism activities and the potential for conflicts of interest with such agencies competing unfairly with private sector operations.

5. Discussion and conclusion

New Zealand is not alone in managing commercial recreation and tourism operations on conservation land. In the English-speaking world, the USA, Canada, and Australia have similar park management systems to New Zealand and face similar challenges, including visitor impacts, limited budgets, and biodiversity conservation objectives. DOC's approach to concessions is closer to the Australian park systems than American or Canadian systems (in terms of government, environment, regulation and scale). Formal methodologies for allocating scarce recreation resources are generally limited to a range of published approaches with which New Zealand resource managers are familiar (such as LAC, VIM, VERP, ROS, and Needs Assessments). To date, none of these has yet proven to offer a miracle answer to concession allocation difficulties. The main conclusion of this review is that no systematic frameworks for concessions management are apparent. DOC and other management agencies appear to concentrate on the procedural aspects of concessions approval processes rather than the strategic rationale for allowing appropriate commercial recreation services within the wider recreation-planning context.

Theory and case studies suggest:

- In most cases it is the combined impacts of concession and independent visitors that are unacceptable. The logical conclusion is that limits should be set on all visitors equally. However, current New Zealand statute prevents this.
- There is no maximum level of concessions and no fixed ratio of concession/independent visitors at high use and multiple use sites.
- Operating conditions and standards should be the same as for non-concession activities. Conditions such as maximum group size or campsite bookings in holiday periods should be applied across all visitor groups, whether using a concession or not. For example: the same maximum group size should be applied to school groups as concession groups or tramping clubs visiting Abel Tasman National Park.
- Measuring concessionaire activity and impacts requires basic visitor statistics on day and overnight use at each location from concessionaires. Site-specific data should be combined with cumulative data on the use of all sites, as impacts are cumulative. Indictors of over-use should be established at problem sites. Quantifying the share of impact by concessionaire visitors is not a useful statistic, but rather the combined information about independent and concession visitors is the priority.
- Impacts of concessionaire visitors are not distinguishable from general public impacts. Visitor impacts are cumulative.
- DOC already has several recreational planning strategies and procedures in place to address the preferred levels of activity within parks. The implication of this study is that the same rules should apply to all visitors, whether they access a park with or without the assistance of a concessionaire. If visitors are considered to be impacting beyond the capacity of a site, management techniques should be implemented fairly on all visitors. This is currently the case with helicopter landings in national parks, since National Park legislation

treats all vehicular access to parks equally. A private helicopter owner wanting access requires the same permit as a concessionaire.

The management theory and international case studies reviewed here indicate that no other country or agency currently offers a complete concession management system that DOC could adopt. DOC will have to develop its own system, and this will be more successful if it was applied through a management process that:

- better integrated concession planning and recreation planning
- had a rationale and framework that allows enforceable conditions and recommendations
- was consistent across the organisation
- was proactive in identifying and making available some core commercial recreation opportunities (e.g. including tendering)
- was supported by quality visitor information and statistics (independent and concession)
- included nationally accepted standards of access and environmental quality
- included effective indicators of environment impact
- was based on public participation in decision making
- had improved processes for liaison with concessionaires

Integrated recreation-concession planning

Within DOC, concession management tends to be separated from other recreation planning, and often includes a variety of non-recreation concession issues. This separation hinders developing integrated visitor planning and does not allow consideration of the service provision spectrum for commercial visitor services such as guided walks. The process of concession management and related cost-recovery have become the main defining concept, rather than the clear relationship to other recreation services and outcomes. Concession services in this context should be recognised first as 'commercial recreation' within a wider recreation management context, and then distinguished as being managed by a particular concession-based approach.

Management rationale and enforcement

Concession management recommendations and conditions must be realistic and workable. A solid and systematic management rationale is needed to underpin the strong management actions sometimes required to support and implement departmental decisions. While access to New Zealand national parks is relatively unregulated, DOC has some experience of strong management actions, such as limiting visitors in certain situations, e.g. campsite bookings, hut bookings, permits for entry to nature reserves. Concessions allow DOC to apply such strong controls and directions to commercial recreation provision in particular.

Consistency across the organisation

Whatever form taken by concession policies, they should be commonly understood, and applied consistently across the organisation and with different external agents.

Proactive management

DOC requires a methodology to identify where commercial provision of recreation services may enhance its desired management outcomes. One problem with becoming more proactive is that DOC is required to recover the costs of concession work. Being proactive means DOC may be required to take some financial risks (for example, tenders may not be filled or filled a lower value than expected).

Visitor Statistics

DOC already collects some visitor statistics, but they are often not comprehensive, coordinated, or circulated to those staff who need them. At problem areas, additional visitor information would be helpful, especially recording visitor numbers at peak periods (generally weekends and summer holidays), and sometimes including their expectations and level of satisfaction. Concessionaire customer records can provide consistently reliable information. If required, concessionaires should normally provide visitor data or statistics in the same format as DOC.

Standards

DOC has developed visitor facility standards for different recreation settings, and now needs to continue into clarifying visitor experience standards and other service standards and performance indicators. The same standards need to be applied consistently to any concession-based activities, services and facilities to be located or otherwise allowed in the same types of areas.

Concessionaire liaison

Several Conservancies have developed very effective relationships with concessionaires via combined newsletters, and staff training that is useful for both concessionaires and DOC. This is based on the premise that concessions can offer benefits to recreation and environmental planning. For example, guided walks can be undertaken by DOC or by a concessionaire. If the same standards are applied, the visitor experience would be much the same. Such visitor services can be provided directly by DOC, or by providers on contract, or by a specific recreation concession. DOC has used this business management model in its recreational facilities programme, with the identified work being contracted out or being put out for tender. The service spectrum concept could be further adopted to provide visitor services. This requires consideration of what visitor services are required, what conditions should apply, the assessment of who is the best to provide that service, and if a concession is the preferred choice, a tender is offered.

The recommendations in this report have implications for existing legislation, policies and strategies. Some of these may require reconsideration. Concession management needs to be addressed at the highest level of DOC visitor policy development to ensure that concession policy is consistent and fair. Concessions need to be seen as an integral part of a national park's suite of recreation facilities and services. A proactive and integrated approach to visitor management offers some solutions. By changing attitudes towards concessionaires, from being an external pressure, to being an alternate provider of more recreation services, more creative recreation management opportunities may be derived.

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Appendix
ANZECC commercial management best practice model

	AUTHORITY • Legislation allows an agency to issue or operate commercial activity • Legislation is the base from which policy is developed • Mandatory approvals required from others including land owner, as applicable • Compliance with Plans of Management ↓		
	POLICY • Specific and written for all commercial activity types, ie. Licences, leases, alien tenure, contract and agency operated enterprise • Available for public scrutiny • Identify why to license—to determine levels and patterns of park use, raise revenue, manage risk or ensure appropriate • Identifies what to provide—accommodation and service provision, (all) tour operators, alien activity • Defines relationship with private sector—competitor, partner, client • Sets core arrangements for time frames, returns, insurance and delegations • Subject to programmed review ↓		
INDUSTRY INPUT → CASHFLOW FORECASTS→ To indicate commercial viability and anticipated outcome of proposal	BUSINESS/PARK PLAN • Policy and Corporate Plan interlinked through review and iteration • 'Concession' Business Plan drafted to quantify outcomes Corporate Plan and endorsed by Executive • Financial Planning essential component of Business Plan • Comprehensive guidelines (manual) provides management criteria and quality and accountable outcomes, and is applied agency-wide • Subject to programmed review ↓		← COMMUNITY INPUT ← AGENCY INPUT
	VALIDATE OPPORTUNITY • Opportunities identified by Business Plan subjected to rigorous validation • Validation check list includes authority to issue, internal approvals, Plans of Management compliance, external approvals (Planning Authority, etc), valuations, lease/licence criteria, agency obligations, proponent obligations ↓		
ADVERTISEMENT →	CONCESSION/CONTRACT OPPORTUNITY • Valid and legitimate Concession/Contract Service Opportunity • Direct industry inquiry submitted on approved application form • Concession opportunity prospectus developed, publicly advertised and submissions managed in keeping with accountable tender process ↓		← INDUSTRY INQUIRY AGENCY INITIATIVE
CASHFLOW FORECASTS →	APPLICATION • (Pro-forma) Application is complete and includes application/processing fee, proponent details, trade and professional references, experience, details of proposal • Deal with as confidential in confidence ↓	AGENCY OPERATED ENTERPRISE • Assessment, planning, cashflow, forecasts and cost benefit analysis	

	ASSESSMENT all categories • Assessment managed as accountable process and follows code of conduct • Assessment rigour applicable to concession complexity, referees contacted, applicant subject to financial and business checks as appropriate • Expert assistance for non-routine and more complex concession and lease assessments • Standardised concession assessment form, cost benefit analysis as required • Rental/returns/contract (tender) fees based on the 'why' of licensing/leasing • Park manager involvement essential to facilitate decision ownership ↓		
↙ LEASE • Usually involve capital development • Can be relatively simple or extremely complex • Lease should be bound to a license especially where ancillary tours included	COMPLEX CONCESSION • Campground management, kiosk operations, safari camp, complex tours, such as guided boat tours, caves management etc. ↓		↘ SIMPLE CONCESSION • Routine concessions, tour operations, single event activities
	APPROVAL • For leases the decision process may be decentralised but to include central unit panel member, lease executed by land owner, associated license executed centrally • For complex concessions decision process may be decentralised but to include central unit panel member and executed centrally • For simple concessions a decentralised decision and execution process that follows and conforms with centralised licensing (quality) control procedures • Standardised agreements used where appropriate to minimise cost and facilitate speedy outcomes ↓		INDUSTRY CONCESSION ↗
← Terminate activity if continued non-compliance	MONITOR AND REVIEW • Electronic (database) records management administered centrally with Regional input and reports • Register tracks currency and status of concessions and monitors renewals, payments, debts, compliance and terminations • Compliance monitoring managed Regionally with annual central input for benchmarking ↓		→ACTIVITY
↙ AGENCY OPERATED ENTERPRISE	RENEWAL • Mandatory concession renewal clauses followed, discretionary renewal on merit and objective • Re-advertise if no renewal option particularly where concession numbers limited and competitive • At end of term and if no renewal provision terminate concession if no longer agency priority or allowable		↘ INDUSTRY CONTRACT