

Closing address: Forever wild

Thank you for attending for these last two days and for making this conference a huge success.

It would be easy to come away from an event like this feeling a little depressed. I know I have. The sobering summaries of ecological collapse, and the threats from introduced pests in New Zealand present a formidable challenge. One that won't be overcome by reducing conservation funding.

We have also been reminded – if we needed it – that some parts of New Zealand don't engage in conservation and outdoor recreation the way that we do.

There isn't time to be depressed though. Over these two days and I have also been energised by the potential that we have to make a positive impact.

For the FMC Executive, the conference has been very useful in highlighting where we should focus and prioritise our effort.

Participation

Our Youth Scholarships are our start at bringing more people into outdoor recreation. We hope to take this further over the next couple of years.

But this is a great opportunity for clubs themselves. By reaching out to communities that aren't traditional trampers clubs can both build their membership and help conservation. It is not so much a case that people have given up tramping for other sports, it is more that people will tramp, climb, mountain bike and kayak. So clubs should look to have partnerships with other recreational groups. Clubs could try working with the local mountain bike club to get some of your members into cycling. Then, reciprocate by taking some of the die-hard cyclists for a tramp.

We have also heard the importance of people starting with local, accessible walks before building up to more remote adventures. Clubs are already ahead of the game here. Our statistics indicate that day trips are the most popular offering from our clubs. I think there is a great opportunity to open these easier day trips, that require less gear, up to people to haven't ventured into the outdoors before. It might require some different arrangements from those that you have now, but the opportunity is too important to turn our backs on.

Conservation

We have heard a lot about the need to focus and prioritise our effort in conservation. The FMC Executive is hoping to develop a partnership with the Kea Conservation Trust. While it is early days, I would like to think that our clubs could focus their effort behind this too. Together I think we can achieve something positive for at least one species. Our donation of \$1000 is a good start. For those of you lucky enough to live near populations of Whio, the NZDA is focusing on the Blue Duck and there might be opportunities to help out your local NZDA branch.

We have also heard that volunteer conservation is a growing form of recreation. Now is a great time to tap into these people, if they are not club members, and to gently introduce them to tramping.

Funding for conservation

What really came through was that we need to spend more on conservation in New Zealand. There is a political dispute as to whether that should come from the public or the private sector. Personally I think that more from both is required. FMC will be keenly engaging in discussions on how to best use private sector funding for conservation without compromising those timeless values that we have fought so hard for over the last eighty years.