

Regional staff join up

Seven regional field advisors have been appointed by the New Zealand Walking Access Commission, chief executive Mark Neeson says.

He said the advisors – (pictured from left) Nicola Henderson, John Gardiner, Chris Tonkin, Geoff Holgate, Noel Beggs, John Wauchop, and Rod McGregor – are the public face of the Commission in the regions.

Mark Neeson said the regional field advisors' roles are new and significant ones.

"They will be the first point of contact for access issues in many cases. Their role includes promoting the objectives and functions of the Commission in their regions, and acting as conduits for independent advice and assistance.

"Their first tasks will be to make contact with regional stakeholders, and open lines of communication on access issues."

Operations manager Ric Cullinane said he was delighted with how his new team was working out.

"They have been getting out and about, meeting people from local councils, Fish & Game councils, recreational groups, and local landholders. There are a wide range of access issues out there, and the regional field advisors are starting to hit their stride."

He said one area of New Zealand was not currently covered by the regional field advisors – the Waikato, Bay of Plenty, central North Island area.

"We are conscious that there is a gap in our network here and we are looking at what can be done to fill it."

The Commission is the Crown Entity that promotes access to the outdoors. It aims to enhance free, certain, enduring, and practical walking access to our beaches, lakes, rivers, and mountains.

The Commission has published an Outdoor Access Code, which spells out the need for people to behave properly and to take responsibility for their actions in the outdoors.

Mark Neeson said it also asks landholders to continue the traditions of New Zealand, which have seen it as customary for landholders to give access to people wanting to cross their land.



"Generally, landholders have been traditionally happy to extend access to their land. In return, it is expected that recreational users will respect the environment and the requirements of farming life."

Other Commission projects include a contestable grants fund, a National Strategy for Walking Access, and an online mapping system to identify publicly-owned land where people would have a reasonable expectation of being able to access.

Mark Neeson said the Commission was established at the end of 2008, after the passing of the Walking Access Act.

"We have worked hard to set up the Commission, and now, with the appointment of regional field advisors, it is operational."

Another funding round

The New Zealand Walking Access Commission plans to call for applications for a second round of Enhanced Access Fund grants in March.

Twelve grants were allocated for projects increasing public access around the country this year, in the first round of grants from the fund. A pool of \$200,000 was available.

If you or your organisation is interested in submitting an application, please visit our website (www.walkingaccess.govt.nz) to obtain more information. Guidelines to help applicants are available on the website.

The opening of the application period will be advertised in local newspapers.

Sign project expands

Expanding public access is a key function of the New Zealand Walking Access Commission, and the Commission's signage project is a useful way to achieve that.

This partnership project with key stakeholders to boost access across private land started this year with Federated Farmers of New Zealand. It is now expanding to include partnerships with Rural Women and Landcorp Farming.

As part of the project, landholders who are willing to participate would display signs on boundary fences to show where they allow access onto their land, contact details, and any conditions of entry. The

signs would also carry the Commission's logo and the logo of partner organisations.

It was originally proposed by Federated Farmers of New Zealand vice-president Donald Aubrey and has been adopted by the Commission's Board as an exciting initiative to achieve new voluntary access.

Fishing and hunting group representatives said they welcomed a programme that saw landholders' contact details more readily available.

Rural Women executive director Noeline Holt said the organisation saw the signs as potentially very useful for members.

Rural Women is completing a re-branding exercise and plans to join the Commission to launch the signs next year.

Landcorp chief executive Chris Kelly said Landcorp was happy to participate in the signage project.

"This would probably be for all farms, but there are some where we have special issues or other parties are involved, and we would need to work through these matters."

For example, Landcorp leased several properties and owners would need to be consulted first.

Landcorp's most well-known property, Molesworth Station, is leased from the Crown and it is subject to a special management plan with arrangements for access already.

"Subject to sorting through some of these issues, I am sure we can co-operate on this project."

Mapping system moves to open testing:

Thousands of eyes have been invited to test out the New Zealand Walking Access Commission's online mapping system.

Next month, "alpha testing" through the website starts, removing the complicated password registration through that was part of the system's "beta testing".

Commission chief executive Mark Neeson said the hundreds of people who had registered to test the mapping system tested three things on behalf of the Commission - the ability of the system to handle the loading of many people using it; how easy people found it to use; and the accuracy of the information.

The online mapping system shows the location of publicly-owned land that the public has a reasonable expectation of being able to access. The Walking Access Act 2008 says it is a function of the Commission to "compile, hold, and publish maps and information about land over which members of the public have walking access", and an online system is the most efficient and cost-effective way to do so.

The system uses aerial photography, topographic maps, and the cadastral



» Operations Manager Ric Cullinane briefs the Topp Twins' Ken and Ken about the online mapping system at the Society of Local Government Managers' annual meeting in Queenstown.

information (the official record of land-ownership in New Zealand) as its base.

The cadastral information held by Land Information New Zealand (LINZ), is the best available. It defines not just roads, but boundaries of farms and other properties as well.

Mark Neeson emphasised that the information was not new.

"No new information is being generated by the New Zealand Walking Access Commission. The presence of unformed legal roads intersecting properties

should not be a surprise to anyone – a title search is a basic requirement for any-one considering a property purchase of any kind."

Commission Board members and staff have been making presentations about the online mapping system to interested groups around the country.

Recent presentations included several days of participation at the Society of Local Government Managers annual conference in Queenstown.

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Guidance document on roads prepared

Recreational access to our lakes, beaches, rivers, and mountains is an important part of what it is to be a New Zealander. Being in the outdoors is part of our cultural identity and something that we see as part of the birthright of all New Zealanders.

Roads are the most secure legal mechanism for ensuring access, and because of this, the Commission has a strong interest in roads – particularly in unformed legal roads.

Commission chairman John Acland said that the New Zealand Walking Access Commission has worked to be the lead Government agency on public access issues.

As part of this, he said, the Commission has taken on from Government, such as providing a “best practice” guidelines document for local authorities, designed to support city councils and district councils in applying the legislation relating to unformed legal roads.

This task was assigned to the Commission by Cabinet in 2008, when it was agreed that the Commission (once established) would “lead a group of government agencies to work with Local Government NZ to develop and issue guidelines for local government on a) the administration of unformed legal roads with the aim of removing possible impediments for their use for walking access, and b) the legislation and administrative practices on the stopping of unformed legal roads”.

John Acland said Commission staff worked with those organisations and many other individuals and organisations to produce this document.

“We hope it will help the practitioners and many others interested in the topic,” he said.

“We also expect that this will be just the first edition – future editions will be produced, taking into account experience and feedback from other organisations and peoples with a role and interest in this topic.”

John Acland said the Commission’s team in Wellington and its network of regional field advisors work closely with local authorities to provide advice, information, and guidance so that any conflict over public access can be resolved as quickly as possible.

The location of roads and other public access routes are identified in the Commission’s online mapping system. Commission chief executive Mark Neeson said that while none of that information was new – it is all already public – the Commission was aware that the mapping system would make it much more easier for people to access that information and, therefore, could increase the workload of territorial authorities who are responsible for roading.

“Unformed legal roads can be hard to identify, but now that people will be able to identify their locations much more easily, that may increase the workload of local authorities as people seek to use those unformed legal roads that offer good access to fishing rivers, for example. We hope this document will be valuable to administrators.”

Former Registrar-General of Lands Brian Hayes, who is a recognised expert in this area of the law, states that the unformed roading network is the true anchor of rights of access to the outdoors.

In his book, *“Roads, Water Margins, and Riverbeds: the law on public access”*, he says: “there has long been a close affinity in New Zealand between roads along water, unformed roads, waterside reservations of public land in lieu of roads, and the publicly owned riverbeds which together provide our recreational highways.”

“The intention of the Crown and the Colonial Office when founding New Zealand was to provide a new open country where the outdoors should be the preserve of the people rather than the privilege of the land owners. At the same time, land in New Zealand was to become a free market commodity, and private rights had to be respected.

“The author has formed the opinion that the roading pattern set out by the early surveyors along water and over land to be Crown granted is and continues to be

the foundation of free, public and permanent access in New Zealand. The intention was that most of these roads would remain in a state of nature. Next to the rivers, mountains, lakes and the sea, the unformed roading network, originally held in trust by the Crown for the people and now administered by local councils, is one of the greatest recreational assets of the nation, for it is the one mechanism that provides an unqualified guarantee of access for everyone.”

Kaumatua appointed



The Commission has been honoured by the appointment of Peho (Basil) Tamiana as its kaumatua.

Peho Tamiana is an educator and dedicated outdoorsman, from Ruatoki. He is Tuhoe and Te Arawa. He plays an active role in local Lions groups and kohanga reo.

Commission chairman John Acland said the Commission was conscious of its responsibilities as a Crown entity dealing with land issues.

“Maori are tangata whenua of Aotearoa-New Zealand. They are partners with the Crown. As a Crown agency dealing with land issues, we take this responsibility seriously.”

The Commission’s logo and taglines reflect this: The Commission’s logo is based upon the visual metaphor of “the pathway”. This reflects the positioning statement of the Commission: “Whaia nga tapuwae o nga Tupuna” (follow the ancestral footprints).

The “stepping stones” used to illustrate New Zealand’s distinct shape also represent an arrow head indicating direction and forward movement.

“Ara Hikoi Aotearoa” is a literal translation of “Walking Access”.

The Year in Review:

The New Zealand Walking Access Commission has made a strong start and has built a robust platform for its work, Commission chairman John Acland says in the Commission's latest Annual Report.

The Commission's second Annual Report has been published and tabled in Parliament.

In his letter in the Annual Report, John Acland said the Commission was nearing the end of its establishment phase. During the 2009-2010 period covered by the Annual Report, the Commission hired staff, moved into its own offices, and started work.

He said the core team had been recruited and is in place, robust processes, systems, and structures have been established, and there is a clear strategic direction for the next five years.

"It was a significant moment for the Board when we walked into the Commission's new premises for the first time in late October 2009. There is now a government organisation leading the way in promoting access after eight years of consultation and debate."

Commission chief executive Mark Neeson said in his foreword to the Annual Report that during the financial year from 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010, the Commission had established itself as an independent organisation and produced the key cornerstones to give effect to the Walking Access Act 2008.

The cornerstones are the National Strategy for Walking Access, the Outdoor Access Code, the Walking Access Mapping System, and the Enhanced Access Fund.

He said he was very pleased with progress made on each of those activities. "They provide a sound base for our future work."

John Acland said the past financial year was a pivotal one for walking access in New Zealand and the Commission's Board was pleased with the Commission's achievements as outlined in the latest Annual Report.

The Annual Report for the New Zealand Walking Access Commission 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010 is available on the Commission's website (www.walkingaccess.govt.nz) or from the Commission (contact@walkingaccess.govt.nz).

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Mark Neeson said it was pleasing that people were showing a keen interest in the system.

"Lots of people have tried out the mapping system in testing and found it to be accurate and useful – this includes FFNZ provincial presidents who have found other mapping systems to be inaccurate, but the Commission's to be correct. Local authorities' staff have also carried out testing and responded positively to it as well."

Mark Neeson said many local authorities had already done or were doing similar mapping of roads and other access ways in their areas. The Dunedin City Council and the Ashburton District Council and the Marlborough District Council are active in this, for example.

He emphasised that the mapping system was not the Commission's only work.

"Also important is the work we are doing around public awareness of the responsibilities about going into the outdoors and how to behave properly. We have published the Outdoor Access Code – available on our website or on request from the Commission – and have distributed summary brochures around the country, in all Fish and Game hunting and fishing license packs, through Department of Conservation visitor centres, and in NZ Deerstalker education kits, for example.

"Next year, we intend to boost that promotion."

Mark Neeson said the Commission's Board and staff believe the New Zealand outdoors is a wonderful resource.

"We recognise that people need to be aware of their responsibilities to ensure that resource remains available to all. Our work is aimed at enhancing that."

He said that talking to people around the country about the Commission's work and the online mapping system showed that there was clearly a demand for this sort of system.

"We are hearing from people – both landholders and recreationists – that it is very important to respect property rights. In order to do that, people need to know where private land is located and where the public land that people can legally access is located."

He said the Commission is working closely with stakeholder representative groups on its projects. For example, Federated Farmers, Federated Mountain Clubs, and Fish & Game NZ are represented on the mapping project's steering committee.



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