

Access fund invites applications again

The New Zealand Walking Access Commission invites applications for grants from its Enhanced Access Fund.

Fund administrator Helen Barker says that up to \$230,000 (including GST) is available for distribution in this year's round. The closing date for applications is 15 April 2011.

She said the Commission has three priorities for the Enhanced Access Fund in this year's round. They are:

- » addressing existing access problems, including the resolution of disputes, and allied activities such as signage;
- » negotiating the retention of existing access, or obtaining new access, including walkways; and
- » supporting community access projects and needs (e.g. responding to visitor demand from outside the area).

The types of activities eligible for funding include:

- » supporting community access initiatives, such as negotiation and other allied services (e.g. legal, surveying and administration costs);
- » supporting the provision of information about access opportunities, or the Outdoor Access Code for the public or landholders;
- » providing access signage on either public or private land;
- » providing access facilities, such as stiles and other structures to facilitate access on either private or public land; and
- » providing for other matters relevant to the promotion of walking access (e.g. research and education programmes).

To maximise the impact of allocations from the Fund, the Commission requires applicants to have the support of other interested parties, either as cash or in kind contributions.

The Enhanced Access Fund cannot be used for activities that could be reasonably expected to be carried out by applicants on their own account, or for personal or commercial profits.

As well as individuals, the following groups and organisations are eligible to apply to the Enhanced Access Fund:

- » community organisations;
- » territorial authorities in combination with community organisations;



» Guests listen as the Pahi walkway is launched. This walkway was one of the first successful applicants to the New Zealand Walking Access Commission's Enhanced Access Fund when it was launched last year.

- » umbrella/lead organisations applying on behalf of local groups;
- » iwi/hapu;
- » administering authorities of walkways;
- » educational organisations;
- » research providers; and
- » any other access-related group or organisation.

Once all applications are received, Helen Barker said, the Commission will assess them, and consider how proposed projects will expand outdoor walking opportunities and recreational enjoyment for New Zealanders. "In particular, an emphasis will be placed on how projects contribute the Commission's overall goals of providing free, certain, enduring and practical access for the public; enhancing opportunities for access; and improving knowledge about access generally."

Twelve projects were funded in last year's round, with proposals across the country, from Northland to Central Otago.

More information about these projects, and guidelines for potential applicants for this year's round are on the Commission's website: www.walkingaccess.govt.nz. Application forms can also be found there.

Successful launch for first EAF project completed

The opening of the Pahi walkway in Northland on 12 March 2011 was a well attended affair, with approximately 80 people attending

The walkway is the first stage in a series of four proposed to link along the Pahi peninsula, and was one of the first projects to receive funding for the New Zealand Walking Access Commission's Enhanced Access Fund.

Commission board member Brian Stephenson, who represented the Commission at the launch along with Regional Field Advisor John Gardiner, said the opening was a celebration for the Commission as well as the local community.

"This walkway is the first track completed, with the help of funds from the Commission's Enhanced Access Fund.

"The Fund was established in 2009, and the Pahi walkway received \$15,000 from the 2010 funding round, which was the Commission's first allocation of funds.

"Allocations are made on merit. In the first round, the applications were well in excess of the funds available. The success of your application was due to the quality of the initial project planning and design, followed up by excellent management."

Brian Stephenson praised project manager Brian Plunkett, who he said with an engineering background had ensured that the track was soundly designed.

"With regular maintenance, it should last a long time."

He said Kaipara was a huge harbour but it did not have many coastal walkways.

The Pahi walkway features an ancient pa site, with well preserved earthworks.

"It helps to put us in contact with our prehistory. It also has a podocarp and kauri forest of note.

"There is plenty of potential to increase the value of this walkway in the coming years, by providing more interpretation of existing features, linking this place to other features close by and developing other connecting coastal walking opportunities."

Others who spoke praised the local community and those who had put real effort into building the walkway for their vision and community spirit. Tom Power, whose family donated the bush block and Pa to the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust, said it was one of the conditions of transfer that a walkway be built.

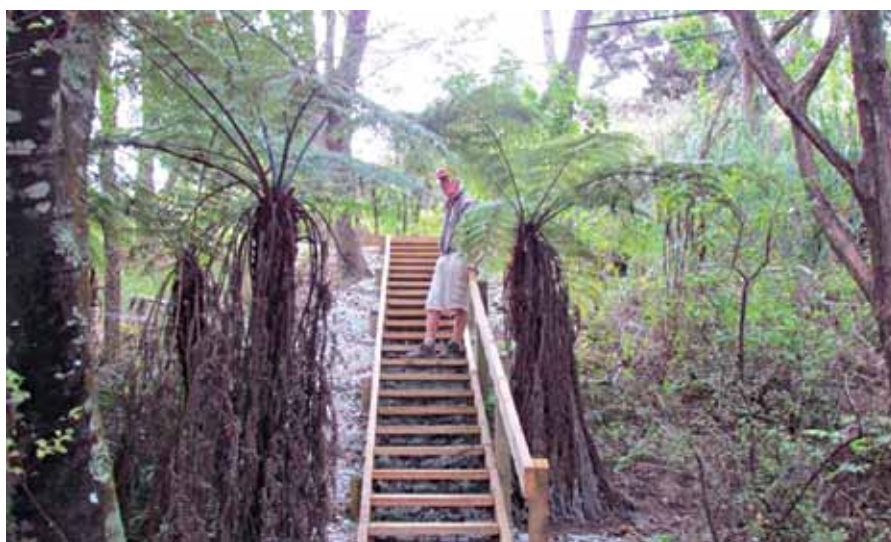
Finally, Kaipara District Council mayor Neil Tiller thanked all those who had been involved and declared the walkway open by unveiling the sign and cutting the ribbon at the start of the hour-long walking track.

WAMS OUT AND ABOUT:

The New Zealand Walking Access Commission's online mapping system showing legal public access throughout New Zealand has gone to "beta mode", with the system being opened for widespread testing.

Commission chief executive Mark Neeson said the Walking Access Mapping System had been tested by an initially small group of users, made up of landholders and recreational representatives in October. This had been widened through November to other interested people and went into an open testing mode in late December.

Mark Neeson said the system's operations would be reviewed during the year, and improvements made. The focus will be on functions that can be of most value for users.



Public access can be economic opportunity

Opening up public access to part of their land could have financial benefits for landholders, New Zealand Walking Access Commission Board member Barbara Stuart says.

She told Marlborough landholders at the Commission's regional forum meeting in Blenheim last year that allowing public access could be a good thing.

The owner of Cable Bay Station, near Nelson, said opening a public walkway across their farm had not only cut down on phone calls, but also benefited them financially.

"Before we did it we were getting phone calls all the time, which was disruptive with a new baby."

The move also increased their income because they had added a campground and a cafe for visitors, Mrs Stuart said.

"My message to rural communities is don't throw the baby out with the bath water. [Access] can strengthen rural communities. We've also got the kayaking on Pepin Island [near us] and Happy Valley up the road."

By allowing access and developing the opportunities that access allowed, rural landholders could give themselves options that enabled them to stay on the land, be financially viable despite tough times in farming, and offer employment opportunities for farmers' spouses, making potentially isolated rural areas more attractive.

"It's something to think about, rather than just rule it out without looking at the possibilities."



» Commission board member Barbara Stuart shows other board members the Cable Bay walkway. From left to right, Brian Stephenson, Barbara Stuart, John Aspinall, John Acland.

Barbara Stuart has 24 years of personal experience managing a public walkway through private land, and has three covenanted areas of coastal bush totalling 200 hectares on her family farm. She also owns and operates a holiday park. She has strong networks with community, non-government organisations, councils and the science community. She has 10 years experience in engaging and supporting private landowners in sustainable land management as a regional coordinator for the New Zealand Landcare Trust. She is a JP and a member of the Horoirangi Marine Reserve Management Board and the Tasman Environment Trust.

Nelson farmer rates his access experience

Having clear signage and route markers make public access provision easy for landholders, says a farmer with a walkway on his property at the top of the Takaka Hill near Nelson.

Nigel Harwood told Commission operations manager Ric Cullinane that the walkway on his property, through interesting and scenic karst landscapes at the top of the hill, opened after an approach by local groups wanting access.

"They said 1000s would come but we doubted this – why would anyone want to walk over this bit of our farm? Now, the car park is rarely empty!"

He said his family agreed to the access because the walkway would have limited disturbance to their main farming operation.

"There was also little for us to do. The signage, kissing gates, track markers and so on were all organised by local groups and trusts. We were involved in the process and maintain some control over the whole thing."

"My family has a long history in the area and strong links to the land and the community. Part of this is sharing with the local community and the wider NZ population."

Nigel Harwood said the walkway was part of his family's push for 'best practice'.

"Part of it is also sharing with the urban population. Our forebears came out here to escape the systems and restrictions of Old England, where a privileged few had access to most of the resources and opportunities."

He says there have been few bad experiences. "Some people have complained about stock - worried they were going to be eaten by a sheep - that sort of thing. There's the odd gate left open, but not too many things we could complain about."

Good signage and track markers help behaviour standards, he says. "We expect respectful, sensible behaviour, and we generally get it. The signs and track marking help a lot here. With a well marked track, most keep to the tracks and follow the rules."

"People who are interested in and do these sorts of walks are mostly pretty good - the sort of people who are going to be sensible anyway."

Longstanding access chairman retires

**South Canterbury identity
John Acland retires in April as chairman of the New Zealand Walking Access Commission.**

His retirement will be the end of almost a decade of leadership in the promotion of access to land, when he has been the face of walking access in New Zealand. He chaired two groups carrying out public consultation on issues around access and was the inaugural chairman of the New Zealand Walking Access Commission when it was formed in 2008.

John Acland took on the mantle of guardianship for the "Queen's Chain" ethos of public access to beaches, waterways and mountains when his friend and former South Canterbury farmer neighbour, Jim Sutton – the then-Minister of Rural Affairs – asked him to take part in a group he was forming to generate discussion of access issues.

"He didn't tell me at the time that I was to be the chair! He only mentioned that much later, in passing at an airport."

At a function at Parliament to thank John Acland for his decades of public service, Agriculture Minister David Carter praised him for his work, not just with walking access, but for agriculture and New Zealand as a whole.

But most importantly, David Carter said, was his promotion of recreational access to the outdoors. "Which I see as a real birthright, a taonga, for all New Zealanders."



» Agriculture Minister David Carter thanks John Acland for his decades of service, not just to walking access, but to agriculture and New Zealand as a whole.

Former minister Jim Sutton told the gathering that he was greatly honoured to speak at the event. He praised John Acland's service and his ability to contribute.

"Walking access is probably the toughest thing you've taken on... I don't know of anyone else who could have brought it to this successful conclusion."

John Acland told the gathering he had enjoyed the past 10 years working on walking access. "When you enjoy something, you just go for it, regardless of the ramifications."

His retirement from the New Zealand Walking Access Commission marks the end of national public service for John Acland. He has also been the chair of the Historic Places Trust and chair of the New Zealand Meat Board, as well as heading numerous other business and community organisations. From a prominent South Canterbury family, John Acland farmed Mt Peel Station, now run by his son, Johnny Acland. He intends to focus on local service, his businesses, and his grandchildren.



» New Zealand Walking Access Commission chairman John Acland, Agriculture Minister David Carter, Rosemary Acland, and former Rural Affairs Minister Jim Sutton.

Commission chief executive Mark Neeson said John Acland's work had been outstanding, and the Commission would not be the organisation it is today without his contribution.

"All of us in New Zealand owe John Acland a tremendous amount for the public service he has devoted his life to carrying out.

"John's mana and experience enabled him to manage and bring about a consensus about access. He faced sometimes fiery public meetings which he handled with skill and diplomacy. I never saw him lose his cool."



CONTACT US

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