

Bringing the Park to the People

PROJECT PROFILE



Purpose of this review:

To highlight the positive social, environmental, and community benefits resulting from the Bringing the Park to the People project.





Project summary

The Fiordland Trails Trust (FTT) was formed to enable the establishment of a high-quality interconnected network of trails in and around Fiordland for non-motorised recreational activity. They aim to create a buzzing outdoor recreation scene around Te Anau, Manapouri and the Te Anau Basin (including Mavora Lakes). FTT is a volunteer based charitable trust of 10 trustees.

With funding from the Jobs for Nature programme, the Trust was enabled to enhance and extend their trail network in Fiordland. The project included weed and predator control, planting to restore biodiversity, creating community education signage, and trail enhancement and extension of at least 6km.



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| Region | Southern South Island |
| Recipient | Fiordland Trails Trust |
| Start date | 23/06/2021 |
| End date | 24/12/2024 |
| Approved funding | \$973,000 |
| Intent | Capability development, Ecosystem restoration, Pest control plants, Recreation enhancement |
| Funder | Department of Conservation |



Why is the project important for the region?

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, Southland's economy stayed strong because agriculture and food manufacturing were essential industries. However, the drop in international tourism hit hospitality and retail businesses hard. This project helped support those affected communities and gave people a chance to do important environmental restoration work.

It also enhanced the region's ecological and recreational infrastructure, making it a more attractive destination for both residents and visitors.

What difference is the project making to people?

Employment Opportunities

In the first year of the project, 15 full-time workers previously employed in the tourism industry were hired. As the tourism sector began to recover, the project transitioned to using skilled local contractors. All of the project's funding was spent within the local community, supporting businesses and suppliers.

The people employed in the initial years may well have been lost to the tourist industry and the Te Anau Community if employment through the Jobs for nature programme was not an option.

Community Benefits and Engagement

The project fostered strong community involvement through public meetings, social media engagement, and media coverage. Presentations were delivered to various community and environmental groups, helping to build a sense of pride and ownership in the local environment. The project was formally recognized by local councils and received an Environment Southland award in 2023.

Recreational Value and Environmental Participation

The project developed 6 kilometres of new trail towards Te Anau Downs and upgraded the existing Lake2Lake trail, transforming previously degraded areas into attractive, park-like spaces. By 2024, the trail network was being used by over 60,000 people annually — twice as many as three years ago.. Alongside these recreational improvements, the community actively participated in planting, maintenance, and conservation work.



Skills and Training

This project allowed workers to receive on-the-job training in native planting and maintenance. They also completed health and safety training, including first aid certification.

Impacts on the environment

Habitat restoration

The project has helped bring life back to the Upukerora River Delta, especially for native birds that live in braided river habitats. Since late 2021, a predator control programme has been in place, using 150 traps. These traps removed harmful animals such as stoats, weasels, ferrets, rats, hedgehogs, mice, and feral cats. This made the area safer for native wildlife and FTT continues with this programme beyond project completion.



Biodiversity protection

More than 15,000 native plants were planted in the Upukerora River Delta and near Patience Bay. A further 4000 have been planted at Tui bay. These efforts are improving wetlands and riverbanks, helping

native species thrive. An old dump site along the Lower Upukerora River has been turned into a green, park-like space for the community and visitors to enjoy. This transformation is a lasting benefit for both nature and the local community, made possible by the Jobs for Nature project.



Economic and tourism benefits

The 4km section of trail from the Upukerora River mouth to Patience Bay has been completed and in use, with funding support from Jobs for Nature, the Fiordland Community Board, and local sources. A further 2km to Sinclair road is near completion at mid 2025.

. These changes have enhanced the trail experience by combining conservation with recreation.

An economic assessment completed by Angus and Associates in 2023 assessed the economic benefits for the trail network of that time at over \$3 million per annum. This included the benefits that accrued from this JFN Project.

References

1. Brunsdon, N. (February 2021). Southland Region post COVID scenario analysis - for Great South.
2. Bringing the Park to the People. (August 2024). End of Project Report.
3. Fiordland Trails Trust website.



INFO 1314

Jobs for Nature: Project Profile

Published in August 2025 by the Ministry for the Environment on behalf of the Jobs for Nature Secretariat.

All images courtesy of the project



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