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Whakatipu Waitai Predator Control Expansion

PROJECT PROFILE



Purpose of this review:

To highlight the positive social, environmental, and community benefits resulting from the Whakatipu Waitai Predator Control Expansion project.





Project Summary

The Hollyford Conservation Trust was set up in 2014 by local landowners who saw the harm caused by introduced predators in the lower Hollyford Valley. The Trust's goal is to protect and restore native plants and animals for both current and future generations.

The project focuses on expanding predator control in the lower Hollyford Valley to safeguard vulnerable native species. The area under stoat control increased from 2,600 hectares to 12,000 hectares.

Region	Southland
Recipient	Hollyford Conservation Trust
Start date	22/07/2021
End date	21/07/2024
Approved funding	\$694,506.00
Intent	Capability Development, Pest Control Animals
Funder	Department of Conservation

Why is the project important for the region?

The project is located in the lower Hollyford Valley, near Whakatipu Waitai (Martins Bay), within the World Heritage Te Wāhipounamu area of Fiordland National Park.

In 2020, the tourism industry in Southland employed about 5,000 people, making up 9% of the region's employment. By 2021, this number dropped to 3,700, or 7% of total employment. The decline in international tourists severely impacted areas like Fiordland and Te Anau, causing business closures and job losses. Job losses in Southland were expected to reach around 5,050 by March 2021, a 9.5% decrease, with tourism being one of the hardest-hit sectors.

In Southland, funded projects focused on ecosystem restoration and pest control, creating employment opportunities and alleviating some of the economic impacts of COVID-19. These efforts aimed to restore natural environments and provided new career opportunities for workers displaced from sectors like tourism.



What difference is the project making to people?

The project created employment and training opportunities for 42 people, including rangatahi (youth) from Makaawhio, seasonal workers impacted by the post-COVID economic downturn, and tourism workers from the Te Anau/Queenstown area.

Skills and Training

The conservation skills they gained during the Hollyford project are highly transferable and can be applied to other conservation work across the country. Six team members received formal chainsaw training, which included both theoretical and practical components with NZQA credits offered.

30 employees received induction and informal training. This type of training is essential for equipping workers with practical skills needed for working on predator control. This included:

- Chainsaw use for track cutting in the bush
- Best practices for using DOC200 traps
- Health and safety procedures, including key hazards, Personal Locator Beacons (PLB), InReach, and radio use
- Navigation using GPS and TrapNZ
- Track marking and clearing techniques
- Camera monitoring and analysis
- Data management
- Bush skills such as off-track walking and selecting appropriate gear/equipment



Community outcomes

The project raised awareness of the importance of protecting the area by using social media updates, newsletters, and community events such as the annual Hollyford Ball. Presentations were also made at community conservation events. The Hollyford Conservation Trust actively connected with the local community through regular communication and events. This involvement built a sense of pride and ownership among community members and stakeholders, many of whom own land at Martins Bay.

How is the project contributing to the wellbeing of Māori?

The project has strong cultural ties with local iwi (tribes), particularly Makaawhio. Instead of appointing a full-time Matauranga Māori Kaiwhakahaere (Māori knowledge manager), two rangatahi from Makaawhio were employed to share their cultural perspectives on-site. This approach emphasised kaitiakitanga (guardianship) over taonga (treasured) species and allowed for cultural exchange and connection to the whenua (land).

The Hollyford Valley and its surroundings hold significant cultural importance for Māori, particularly the Ngāi Tahu iwi. This region, including Whakatipu Waitai (Martins Bay), is part of the historic pounamu (greenstone) trails used by Māori for transporting and trading greenstone from the West Coast to the East Coast. Ngāi Tahu have a deep connection to this land, which is reflected in their continued involvement in tourism and conservation efforts in the area and making sure it's preserved is important.

Impacts on the Environment

Improved Biodiversity

The project will lead to an increase in our indigenous bird populations. For example since work carried out in 2014 the population of korimako/ bellbirds has increased from one to eight per hectare, and miromiro/ tomtits have risen from one to six per hectare. This shows a direct positive impact on biodiversity as indigenous species thrive when predators are controlled.

Sustainable Ecosystem Management

By expanding predator control areas, the project supports the resurgence of native plant species such as fuchsia and rātā. This helps maintain ecological balance by allowing these plants to flourish without being over-browsed by pests.

The installation of 1,100 DOC200 traps and deployment of 10 cameras for stoat monitoring manages pest populations

effectively. These measures are required for tracking pest activity and ensuring that control efforts are successful.

A total of 9,700 hectares has been treated for mustelids. This large-scale treatment is critical for maintaining ecological balance and protecting endangered species within Fiordland National Park. By July 2023, 125km of new line had been cut and marked as part of the Jobs for Nature expansion with traps installed along all of these lines.

By the end of July 2024, 546 stoats had been removed from the new 9,700ha expansion area with a notable reduction in stoats in the original 2,600ha core area this year. This expanded network provides protection and secure habitat for vulnerable indigenous species including matuku-hūrepo/bittern, tawaki/Fiordland crested penguin, kākā, kākāriki, kakaruai/robin, and mātātā/fernbird. It is hoped that this will be a stepping stone towards the re-introduction of tokoeka/kiwi back into the Hollyford in the future.



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