

**MAHI | JOBS**  
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# Backcountry Trust Project Profile



Purpose of this review:

**To highlight the positive social, environmental, and community benefits of the Backcountry Trust work programme.**







## Project summary

The Backcountry Trust has a long-standing partnership with the Department of Conservation to maintain New Zealand's network of backcountry tracks and huts. This collaboration has been instrumental in preserving the country's outdoor heritage and ensuring the sustainability of recreational infrastructure. They were granted nearly \$2 million to fix and maintain these facilities in some of our most secluded areas.

The Backcountry Trust's work under the Jobs for Nature programme included roofing, painting, general repairs, and ensuring tracks are safe and accessible, which is vital for pest control efforts.

The Backcountry Trust empowers local communities and volunteers to take an active role in the preservation and maintenance of backcountry huts and tracks. The Trust has engaged over 1,400 volunteers who have collectively invested 35,000 hours into these projects since its inception in 2014.

## Importance of funding to the regions

The project work extended to smaller communities like Murchison, Wanaka, and Reefton, where the communities were affected by a loss of tourism revenue due to COVID-19 lockdowns. By aligning the work on Public Conservation Land and distributing funding into these smaller communities, the Trust was able to support them during difficult times.

Region	Nationwide
Recipient	Backcountry Trust
Start date	29/09/2020
End date	30/06/2023
Approved funding	\$1,996,280
Intent	Capability development, ecosystem restoration, historical or cultural heritage restoration, pest control plants, recreation enhancement
Funder	Department of Conservation



# What difference is the project making to people?

## Employment opportunities and income support

The funding has created 215 employment opportunities. As of June 30, 2023, 147 people had been employed, with just over 19,374 hours worked. Five people have been employed to work full time post-project completion.

The project created jobs for skilled workers in tourism and construction, supporting them through tough economic times. It offered flexible, short-term work for construction sole traders, which was especially valuable during COVID-19 lockdowns when many projects were stalled due to supply chain issues. By using materials unaffected by these disruptions, the Backcountry Trust projects supported continuous work and financial stability for workers and their families.

The Trust was also able to hire skilled workers for specialised tasks like building and roofing, providing them with opportunities to use and enhance their skills.



## Social inclusion and participation

The project has helped improve social inclusion and participation in nature-based employment. The employment opportunities from the project have created more diversity in the workforce, comprising of:

30% female and 70% male

10% Māori and 90% New Zealand European.

The age distribution of the workforce is as follows:

5% are aged 18-24

73% are aged 25-49

20% are aged 50-64

2% are aged 65 or older.



## Improved community engagement and wellbeing

The project has improved access to New Zealand's natural landscapes by maintaining and restoring 30 backcountry huts, bridges and 130 kilometres of tracks. These huts, often located in scenic and remote areas, provide shelter and rest for outdoor enthusiasts, enhancing their experience and contributing to the quality of life for local residents.

The project saved a crucial hut on the Wangapeka Track from being removed by relocating and rebuilding it, ensuring continued access for the local community and visitors. This was the most





cost-effective solution than traditional commercial or government contracts. By relocating the hut to a geotechnically approved site, the project mitigated environmental risks associated with the original location, such as the sinkhole.

Engaging in projects like these builds stronger community ties and professional networks, improving collaboration and mutual support among participants. The rebuilt hut is an important asset for the local community in Karamea and attracts visitors. Volunteering and community service improves mental and physical well-being by reducing stress, combating depression, and providing a sense of purpose and accomplishment for the residents.

### **Protection of historical and cultural assets**

New Zealanders have a deep cultural connection to their wilderness areas, valuing the freedom and heritage associated with outdoor recreation. The work of the Backcountry Trust helps maintain these values by making sure that the infrastructure supporting backcountry experiences is well-maintained and accessible.

The project helped preserve our cultural heritage by restoring important cultural assets. The work included major rebuilds of historic huts like Aspiring Hut in the Matukituki Valley, through to smaller hut

rebuilds like Mid Wairoa Hut and Dunns Creek Hut.

The Aspiring Hut, located in the Mount Aspiring National Park, underwent a significant refurbishment. The 32-bunk hut in the remote West Matukituki Valley near Wānaka received a \$1.3 million refurbishment and has been reopened to the public. The hut is a historic stone structure that provides shelter for trampers and is managed by the New Zealand Alpine Club. The restoration of the hut was a major community rebuild project, helping it to remain standing for many years into the future.

## **How is the project contributing to the wellbeing of Māori?**

In the North Island, an iwi working for the Trust, Ruapehu WorX, carried out work on the Matemateāonga Track and a project in Tararua Forest Park. This work was particularly meaningful for young people from Ngāti Rangī who wanted to do conservation work in their region. The project has helped these individuals improve their environmental stewardship skills and deepen their understanding of the importance of environmental protection.

Most of the team had been adversely affected by COVID-19 in some way, so having employment during this time was especially meaningful. The initial focus of the company was on cycleways and walkway tracks, trail building and maintenance, and then pivoting to pest and weed control management under the J4N programme.





# Impacts on the environment.

## Increased protection of New Zealand's indigenous biodiversity

The work has also contributed to the restoration of ecosystems. The funds have been used to control pests and weeds, restore wetlands, and rejuvenate native bush, rivers, and streams.

The project has helped protect our indigenous biodiversity by creating physical structures like a new bridge across the Dart River on public conservation land. This bridge, part of the Rees-Dart network, will be maintained for future use.

The projects pest control efforts included further support for the Predator Free 2050 initiative. This work allows access to trap lines in places like the Ruahine Forest Park for volunteers and DOC.



By maintaining huts and tracks, the Trust helps mitigate environmental impacts such as erosion and habitat disruption that can occur with unmanaged or deteriorating infrastructure.

The Backcountry Trust was involved in removing lead, a significant threat to the backcountry Kea, from around 28 huts in alpine zones. This action not only protects the kea but also enhances the water tightness of the buildings and reduces long-term maintenance costs.

## Economic and tourism benefits

The huts restored and maintained are popular among domestic and international tourists and outdoor enthusiasts, which helps boost the local economies as these visitors contribute to businesses in the region. Some of these huts are situated in areas abundant with wildlife, which provides additional tourist attractions such as wildlife viewing.

One of the restoration projects was the Big River to Waiuta Track, a significant mountain biking trail on the West Coast. Mountain biking is a popular outdoor activity that attracts many enthusiasts domestically and internationally, contributing to the local economy.

The North-west Circuit, a popular track on Rakiura/ Stewart Island, has benefited from extensive maintenance work funded by the Jobs for Nature programme.

The project involves clearing overgrown vegetation, repairing and upgrading track surfaces to ensure paths are safe for hikers, maintaining backcountry huts by painting, cleaning, and fixing roofs and chimneys, and taking care of bridges and other infrastructure to ensure visitor safety and comfort. By keeping the North-West Circuit well-maintained, the project helps to attract visitors to Stewart Island contribute to local tourism and the regional economy.

The Backcountry Trust has now received Community Conservation Partnership Funding of \$1,000,000 over two years. This funding will help continue the work on these projects.

The The Backcountry Trust performance report can be found here: [Performance Report - BACKCOUNTRY TRUST - Supporting Aotearoa's Backcountry Heritage](#)



## References

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## Jobs for Nature: Project Profile

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**All images courtesy of the project**



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