

# **Big Bay Awarua Conservation Trust Project Profile**



Purpose of this review:

**To highlight the positive social,  
environmental, and community benefits  
resulting from the Big Bay Awarua  
Conservation Trust project**







## Project Summary

The Big Bay Awarua Conservation Trust is committed to preserving the unique ecosystems of Te Hokiauau / Big Bay, located in the remote northern Fiordland and South Westland. The Trust mainly focuses on protecting native bird species and eliminating invasive pests that threaten vulnerable birds like the mātātā/fernbird, matuku-hūrepo/bittern, rail, and kākā

With funding from the Jobs for Nature programme, the Trust has set up a predator control grid over 1,500ha with intensive control across 900 hectares around Waiuna Lagoon, an important wetland area. This project aims to restore biodiversity, create employment opportunities and include the local community in conservation efforts.

Region	Southland
Recipient	Big Bay Awarua Conservation Trust
Start date	12/07/2021
End date	11/07/2024
Approved funding	\$383,000
Intent	Capability Development, Pest Control Animals
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. The loss of international tourism affected the hospitality and retail sectors. This project supported communities hit hard by the tourism downturn and provided an opportunity for important restoration and regeneration work.

This area features diverse ecosystems, including mountains, beaches, rainforests, rivers, and wetlands, which are threatened by invasive species like rats, stoats, and possums. When combined with the neighbouring Hollyford Conservation Trust project, there is 14,000 hectares of continuous managed forest in the region, targeting stoats, possums, and rats.



Individuals received informal training in areas such as animal pest control and monitoring, guided by field supervisors. Many participants have transitioned to other roles or continued in seasonal roles, applying the skills they acquired from the project.

Conservation training was provided to four individuals from Makaawhio, upskilling their capability and equipping them with skills in track cutting, trap checks, rodent monitoring, GIS usage, and map reading. This training contributed to improving the capability and capacity of individuals in conservation efforts.

### Improved Wellbeing

Participants reported that reconnecting with nature and contributing to wildlife protection positively impacted their wellbeing. Team members expressed pride in their contributions to wildlife protection at the Big Bay Awarua Conservation Trust and enjoyed a sense of achievement. Engaging with nature and participating in conservation activities has been shown to improve both mental and physical health, and this helps to improve overall community wellbeing.

### Recreational value

Big Bay / Te Hokiauau lies on the Pyke – Big Bay Route, a renowned walking track and packrafting route often combined with the Hollyford Track. The local community has a long connection with recreational activities including whitebaiting and fishing along the Awarua River. Ngāi Tahu also have a strong connection and long history with the area.



## What difference is the project making to people?

### Employment Opportunities

The Trust worked closely with Makaawhio to identify individuals keen on acquiring conservation skills. Training and employment opportunities were offered to rangatahi or young people whenever possible as well as locals in need of employment following the COVID-19 economic downturn. As a result, 27



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

The Trust acknowledges that Māori have a deep connection to the land, with their mana intertwined with its history, landscapes, and legends. This relationship is reflected in the Trust's efforts to protect and conserve the natural environment, which aligns with Māori values of guardianship and stewardship.

The project formed a strong relationship with Te Rūnanga o Makaawhio to provide employment and training opportunities to grow conservation skills and promote kaitiakitanga. Makaawhio representatives were employed for track cutting and the sharing of Mātauranga Māori.



## Impacts on the Environment

### Biodiversity Protection

Waiuna Lagoon is a nationally significant wetland that is home to a diverse range of species, including endangered birds like the matuku-hūrepo/ Australasian bittern

and mātātā/ fernbird. Protecting these wetlands helps preserve these species and their habitats. The Trust has established a trapping network over 1,500 hectares around Waiuna Lagoon to control invasive species and protect vulnerable native birds such as mātātā/fernbirds, matuku-hūrepo/bitterns, rails, and kākā. This network includes 71 kilometres of tracks for trap and bait lines, with 200 double-set DOC200 trap boxes and 50 tracking tunnels for pest monitoring.



### Habitat Restoration

Efforts to restore habitats focus on protecting native forests and wetlands to maintain biodiversity and ecological balance. Key activities include:

- Establishing a 900 hectare intensive predator control grid centred around Waiuna Lagoon.
- Eradicating invasive species and monitoring their populations.
- Preserving native forests, wetlands, nesting habitats, wild coastlines, and rainforests.
- The infrastructure for predator control will be maintained to continue reducing pests and restoring the ecosystem.

### Water quality and flood control improvements.

Wetlands like Waiuna Lagoon act as natural filters by trapping sediments and absorbing pollutants from water, thereby enhancing water quality essential for healthy aquatic ecosystems. They also help manage flood risks by absorbing excess rainwater and stabilising water levels, protecting downstream areas from flooding.



## References

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## Jobs for Nature: Project Profile

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**All images courtesy of the project**



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