

Reflections on 30 years for DoC

THE Department of Conservation turned 30 on April 1 and Malcolm Smith, a community ranger based in Wairoa, reflected on the past three decades.

DoC was formed by merging conservation aspects of the Forest Service, Department of Lands and Survey and the Wildlife Service in 1987.

Its creation was a declaration that New Zealand valued its nature, wildlife and remaining wild places, and was committed to protecting it for future generations.

At the time of DoC's formation, New Zealand's relationship with its environment was changing. The prevailing philosophy of resource management and development was challenged by a grass-roots swell of activism reflecting the public's opposition to the ongoing destruction of irreplaceable natural heritage in the name of short-term development.

Mr Smith's journey began with the Wildlife Service in 1971. He joined the Department of Lands and Survey, National Parks and Reserves in Timaru in 1980, after a short break farming, he then had a stint at Banks Peninsula before transferring to Aniwanuiwa in 1985, and in 1987 to DoC.

He worked for DoC in Aniwanuiwa, Wairoa, Napier and Gisborne in various roles ranging from field centre manager and supervisor, to partnerships and community ranger.

"When I first started areas were divided into districts. I worked in the Urewera district, which included Whirinaki, Te Urewera and Wairoa.

"The first district conservator was based at Minginui with the regional office in Rotorua.

"Technology was a challenge; a phone call from Te Urewera was through a telephone exchange operator. A computer was used for the accounts, wages were paper-based and invoices processed locally. Today it's different with internet, mobile phones, e-mail and video-conferencing enabling rangers to be more connected while in the field."



□ Supervising staff fire training . . . from left, rangers Trudi Ngawhare, Graeme Atkins and Rebecca Lander with supervisor Malcolm Smith.

Mr Smith is passionate about fire management and has been involved in fighting fires on the East Coast, around

the country and overseas in Australia, Canada and the United States. The Forestry Service used to be

responsible for rural fires but after corporatisation this shifted to "rural fire authorities" including DoC and councils.

In 1987, most fire equipment transferred to Timberlands and DoC had minimal gear. But DoC had additional responsibility and lifted its game in training staff to handle fires.

A significant change is imminent with the advent of Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ), due to take effect on July 1.

Mr Smith has really enjoyed his work with DoC.

"The best thing is the people I've worked with over the years. Anyone who works for DoC really wants to be here and is committed to conservation. It's a privilege to work alongside such a dedicated team of people."

Over the past three decades, in addition to being involved in a wide range of critical conservation projects, Mr Smith has increased his skills and grown as a person in his own right. He looks forward to continuing to contribute to conservation on the East Coast for future generations.

DoC achieves milestones with supportive communities

A MASSIVE 8.5 million hectares of public land — approximately 30 percent of New Zealand's landmass — and 44 marine reserves are managed by the Department of Conservation.

This includes managing 14,000 kilometres of tracks and more than 950 huts.

These places are used by 48 percent of New Zealanders (about 1.6 million people) and approximately 30 percent of overseas visitors.

The East Coast branch of DoC manages 140km of track and five visitor huts.

DoC director-general Lou Sanson said since its beginning 30 years ago, DoC had made headlines for its world-leading efforts to protect natural values and provide recreation opportunities.

"All the key conservation milestones over the past 30 years in New Zealand have been achieved with great teams of DoC staff and their

supportive communities.

"The social environment has changed and the value of nature is more widely recognised. DoC continues to work with its communities of interest to provide access, make everyone welcome and protect New Zealand's wild places."

Several key milestones stand out for DoC over the past 30 years. In particular, the solid relationship with its Treaty partners has enabled conservation to spill out beyond its defined boundaries and encompass a wider, more holistic approach.

An area three times the size of Stewart Island has been added to the conservation estate as well as more than 40 marine reserves.

There have been vast improvements in recreation management and the establishment of the Great Walks as popular

outdoor experiences. Improved pest control methodology allows better management of threatened species, reducing the level of threat for many species and bringing some species back from the brink of extinction.

Mr Sanson said DoC can't face these conservation challenges alone. Recently the department's strategy has incorporated active partnerships. These partnerships range from grass-roots community groups making a local difference, to commercial partnerships with some of New Zealand's largest companies.

Growth in tourism is supporting regional prosperity, and brings its fair share of challenges too. Protecting our nature while connecting a growing number of people to it, is one of the challenges facing DoC. Inclusive visions like Predator Free 2050 will help to shape the way forward for DoC.