**NZAC hosts successful Sustainable Summits Conference**

130 people attended the Sustainable Summits Conference organized by the New Zealand Alpine Club (NZAC) in the Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park from 7-11 August.

Hugh Logan, former Director General of the New Zealand Department of Conservation, articulated the spirit of the conference in his *Summing Up-What Can We Do?* presentation. *“The conference is the third in a series where people passionate about sustainable management of mountain areas have gathered to discuss social, environmental and economic issues affecting mountain areas from the perspective of sustainability.”*

The conference comprised discussions from a number of emanate speakers and focused its attention on three core themes:

**Environmental Impacts**

Human waste, water contamination, noise from helicopters and other machines, tracks and erosion, huts, bridges and tracks – visual impacts.

**Natural Hazards**

Large rockfalls, ice recession and unstable geology, avalanches, adverse weather conditions, floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions

**Social Impacts / Cultural Values**

Pressures on popular mountain routes – increasing numbers, out-of-season use of tracks, hut and track development; commercialism in the mountains; influences of social media; cultural awareness and visitor implications, Tōpuni areas (sacred), water protection

The conference opened with a welcome video message from UIAA President Frits Vrijlandt and Mountain Protection Commission President Dr Carolina Adler.

Don Bogie, longstanding member of the UIAA Safety Commission, produced a rundown of the key points raised at the conference.

**Spiritual Values of the mountains and community connection**

\* The importance of mountains to Iwi and the mountain users from a spiritual perspective.

\* Local communities may feel alienated from their Parks as visitor numbers rise.

**Visitor pressures on alpine areas**

\* New Zealand does not have the same pressures on its high alpine areas from climbers as other places. New Zealand’s pressures are in the front country where increasingly large numbers of visitors come to see the mountains and from aircraft based sightseeing and landings.

\* Worth keeping an eye on whether alpine guiding will attract more users particularly lower skilled people who want an alpine experience that includes summiting prominent mountains such as Aspiring. This has the potential to put pressure on some places.

**Dealing with Human waste**

\* Human waste lasts for a long time in glacial environments. It eventually comes out somewhere and will pollute downstream waters.

\* Carry out policies for human waste at high use sites is about both the environmental concerns and preserving the experience for others. An opportunity exists at present to use carry out at the new Mid Tasman NZAC hut.

\* As use increases in alpine places and in the busy mountain front country tourist sites costs of dealing with human waste will go up. There is a need to get more innovative with how this issue is dealt with.

**Climate change and associated rapid geological changes**

\* As climate change and glacier changes happen tourism operations will want to be able to find different locations as access changes and new opportunities for different products occur.

\* Access to some traditional climbing places will get harder and the alpine climbing seasons timing will change so routes can still be climbed on snow.

\* Weeds being more likely to establish on disturbed ground post any rockfall or debris flows particularly post wide scale landslides associated with a major earthquake.

**Hazards to visitors from Alpine Fault and increased rockfall activity**

\* The likelihood of a major earthquake on the Alpine fault at 30% chance in the next 50 years is 0.6% per annum or 3% in the next 5 years. It will be very disruptive to road access and other infrastructure. It will be followed by years of increased debris flows onto alluvial flans which will create further ongoing issues.

\* In the event of a large earthquake on the Alpine Fault serious risks to visitors on Public Conservation Land will occur in places where cosiesmic landslides are likely to occur, such as Milford Sound, Aoraki, Fox and Franz Glacier access and large areas of the backcountry.

**Mountain Huts**

\* Climate change, rapid geological change, earthquake risks and increasing rockfall hazards are all affecting the viability and safety of a number of current hut sites, it is likely to get worse. There are fewer safe sites available now than there had been in the past.

\* Where sites have limited lifespans smaller relocatable huts may become a viable option.

The next Sustainable Summits will be held in Chamonix, France in 2018 with the support of the Petzl Foundation.

**Further information:**

[http://sustainable-summits.com](http://sustainable-summits.com/category/blog/)

Hugh Logan presentation

Don Bogie presentation

**Media coverage:**

[Interview with Dawa Steven Sherpa on Radio New Zealand](http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/saturday/audio/201812043/dawa-steven-sherpa-everest-and-environment)

[Mt Cook conference to help reduce user impact on NZ's mountains](http://www.stuff.co.nz/timaru-herald/news/82226326/mt-cook-conference-to-help-reduce-user-impact-on-nzs-mountains)

[prelude](http://www.stuff.co.nz/timaru-herald/news/82226326/mt-cook-conference-to-help-reduce-user-impact-on-nzs-mountains)

[Quick retreat of New Zealand's glaciers an issue for tourism](http://www.stuff.co.nz/business/industries/82972910/quick-retreat-of-new-zealands-glaciers-an-issue-for-tourism)

[Predator tax and national park charges may be the way ahead for NZ](http://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/opinion/83097058/editorial-predator-tax-and-national-park-charges-may-be-the-way-ahead-for-nz)