

Clubs asked to adopt track

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The Department of Conservation is asking 4WD clubs to adopt a track.

Doc is encouraging off-road enthusiasts to come to it with ideas on how to do things better as it prepares its Conservation Management Strategy for the next 10 years.

Permit systems have already been introduced in some areas and co-operation with off-road motoring clubs around the region is helping to protect sensitive areas, allowing for the continued use of the various tracks in Otago.

Wanaka area office manager Paul Hellebrekers said Otago had a range of challenging routes on conservation land Doc was promoting for 4WD vehicle use, but drivers should stay on the roads to protect the fragile high-country terrain.

Coastal Otago area manager Robin Thomas said 4WD vehicle and motorbike users had occasionally damaged or disturbed wetlands in Te Papanui Conservation Park in the past.

"These fragile wetlands and bogs in the wetter coastal area are prone to damage and can take decades to recover."

Drivers had also been braiding the tracks by going around soft parts of the tracks, but that problem had been "largely solved" by liaising with the local clubs and armouring the main route to provide a more solid base, he said.

The department was encouraging 4WD and motorbike clubs to "adopt a track".

"Come and talk to us about your ideas for good routes. We can find ways you can help, like removing water from tracks and distributing gravel on to boggy sections.

"We want to provide opportunities for vehicles in the back country and we encourage clubs to hold working bees on sections of tracks to allow that," Mr Thomas said.

Mr Hellebrekers said there were many opportunities for 4WD vehicle use on public conservation land, especially on roads running through



Ford momentum ... 4WD enthusiasts make the most of a great day in the Oteake Conservation Park.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

areas that were formerly pastoral leasehold land.

In the Pisa Conservation Area access is allowed under a permit system introduced in 2008 after 4WD vehicles and trail bikes damaged fragile wetland areas on top of the Pisa Range.

The Pisa Range permit system was working well at no cost to drivers, and satisfied adjacent neighbours who had

concerns about the behaviour of drivers, Mr Hellebrekers said.

Wakatipu area manager Greg Lind said Macetown had experienced major problems with drivers of 4WD vehicles going off-road and causing degradation in wetland areas.

The department had reduced the problem by using signs, fencing and prosecutions and working with

neighbouring landowners. "So now four-wheel drivers are still enjoying a unique 4WD experience with its many river crossings and remote country," Mr Lind said.

★ The public can view the draft Otago CMS on the Doc website, www.doc.govt.nz/ cms. This website also includes a submission form. Submissions close on September 13.