

Biological Corridors Throughout the Length of New Zealand

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Molesworth Muster Trail, New Zealand

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New Zealand is currently covered by over 86,000 km² of protected areas, making up 32% of our total land area.¹ Since the establishment of Tongariro National Park in 1894, formally protecting land has become part of New Zealand's culture.² We do this by creating a range of different parks (national, conservation, etc.) and reserves (nature, scientific, scenic, historic, recreation, etc.). New Zealand has been a world leader in this area, with Tongariro National Park only the fourth national park in the world.³ As New Zealand's tourism industry grows, these reserves become even more important as a unique strategic asset. It is vital that we protect and manage these areas for the benefit of future New Zealanders.

During the 2017 TVNZ show *What Next?*, one of my points of greatest leverage for the future was to develop biological corridors to connect our national parks. This would be a way of fostering a deeper understanding of the environment, especially among young people, and therefore would also be a legacy investment in New Zealand's long-term future.

This idea stems from an initiative by the nation of Bhutan, nestled between India and China (with a population of 807,610 in 2017).⁴ Thanks to its protected forest areas, the whole country is carbon negative rather than just carbon neutral.⁵ There is a provision in Bhutan's constitution stipulating that at least 60% of the country must be under forest cover and, as of 2016, forest cover was as high as 72%.⁶ The country's forest cover is connected with a network of 'biological corridors', allowing wildlife to move freely in their natural habitats throughout the whole country. This is part of why Bhutan is also a 'global biodiversity hotspot'.⁷ Bhutan also takes a holistic approach to development, using 'Gross National Happiness' as an index of success rather than GDP. As part of this, the government sets aside 'resources to help communities who live in those parks manage their forests, adapt to climate change, and lead better lives while continuing to live in harmony with Mother Nature'.⁸

The McGuinness Institute is particularly interested in the Marlborough region, which has been the subject of an ongoing struggle between industry (particularly aquaculture) and environmental groups. We are also interested in the recent survey by the Department of Conservation (DoC) on the future of Molesworth Station.⁹ The Station's farming lease expires in two years and, because the land is a recreational reserve owned by the public, its fate is currently being considered by DoC and the Minister of Conservation. In our view, the best use of this land would be to make Molesworth Station (indicated on the map overleaf in orange) New Zealand's 14th national park and link the new Molesworth National Park to a new Marlborough National Park (the 15th national park). This could be the beginning of our first biological corridor, creating a unique pathway from the mountains to the sea. Blenheim would become the centre and guardian of a thriving ecotourism industry.

The map on the following page illustrates our vision for a network of biological corridors that connects all of New Zealand's national parks, as well as other forest parks and land administered by DoC. Further to this, we wonder if there is a percentage of forest cover that we could set as a target for New Zealand to reach by the year 2058; the year 2058 is the institute's focus for all our foresight work.

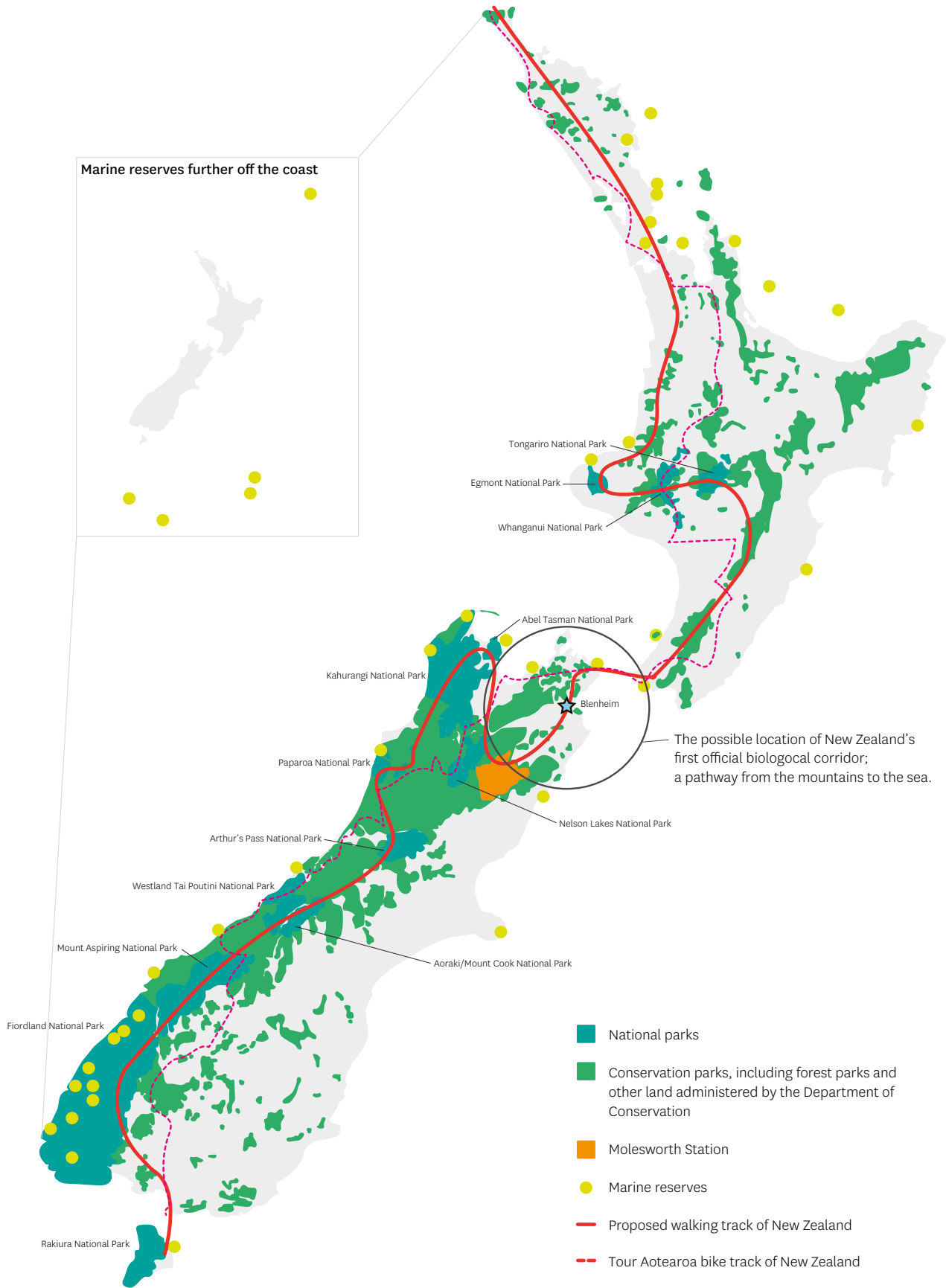
Figure 1: Biological corridors in Bhutan¹⁰



For complete references and to find out more, visit our website:
www.mcguinnessinstitute.org

Walk the length of New Zealand through biological corridors of conservation land

Adapted from: DoC. (n.d.a). *Marine reserves map*. Retrieved 27 March 2018 from www.doc.govt.nz/marine-reserves-map; Te Ara. (2015). *National parks map*. Retrieved 27 March 2018 from www.teara.govt.nz/en/map/14418/national-parks-map; and DoC. (n.d.b). *Map of Nelson/Marlborough conservancy*. Retrieved 27 March 2018 from www.doc.govt.nz/pagefiles/35004/nelson.jpg.



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