

Significant natural areas in the Waikato region

Significant natural areas

The Waikato region still contains numerous natural areas that provide habitats for native plant and animal species, and provide ecosystem services to the region. Some of these natural areas contain threatened species or rare types of habitat that make them more important relative to other natural areas without these features. These areas are called significant natural areas (SNAs) and often occur on private land.

SNAs are an integral part of New Zealand's natural heritage and provide a range of benefits to humans and to other living things.



Whangapoua Estuary.

SNAs could be...	Benefits could include...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> streams with native plants on their banks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clean water habitats for native fish and other animals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> areas of native bush or scrub with a dense understorey and few weeds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clean air erosion reduction corridors to other natural areas for native wildlife
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> wetlands with native plants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> habitats for native wildlife water cleansing flood reduction scenic appeal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> caves with glow worms, cave weta, and other unique wildlife 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> habitats for rare native plants and wildlife places for tourists to visit and enjoy

The Waikato Regional Council identifies SNAs to:

- protect our natural heritage for future generations
- protect sufficient habitats so that threatened species do not become extinct
- link up or re-connect SNAs to improve their health
- meet the Resource Management Act* legal requirements.

* The Resource Management Act (RMA) 1991 requires regional and district councils to protect "areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna".



Coromandel Harbour.



Kawhia Harbour coastal wetlands and native forest remnants.



Photo: DOC.

Mahoenui giant weta.



Wharekawa Harbour coastal forest.



Geothermal area, Wairakei.



Native forest, Pureora.

How SNAs are being identified

Step 1

Predominantly natural areas are being identified by the Waikato Regional Council using aerial photography.

Step 2

These areas are then assessed against 11 significance criteria* using aerial photography and existing ecological reports and information. The criteria were established as part of a public process and endorsed by the Environment Court.

* The 11 criteria are included in Appendix 3 of the RPS and can be accessed via www.ew.govt.nz/rps.

Step 3

These areas are then assigned a level of significance (international, national, regional, local) to enable prioritisation of resources when assisting in the protection of these areas, see Appendix I.

Step 4

The resulting SNA report and dataset is peer reviewed for data accuracy.

Step 5

A list of potential SNAs are then provided to district councils for further review or refining – this may involve discussions with the landowners and ground truthing.

What happens after SNAs are identified

District councils and the Waikato Regional Council then decide how to protect SNAs in their areas in consultation with relevant landowners. This may include the use of rules in district or regional plans as well as funding and assistance by way of rates relief, pest and weed control or fencing. Approaches may vary from district to district so for clarification contact your local district council office as well as the Waikato Regional Council.

What the Waikato Regional Council can do to assist landowners with SNAs

Although the Waikato Regional Council currently has no contestable funding to directly help individual landowners protect SNAs on their land, there is some assistance available to community groups undertaking plant and animal pest control projects on public or private land.

Other assistance that the Waikato Regional Council provides includes the Environmental Initiatives Fund (which assists community groups, schools and organisations with environmental projects). The Waikato Biodiversity Forum (supported by the Waikato Regional Council, the Department of Conservation and district councils) can also help with advice and information regarding protection of SNAs.

The Waikato Regional Council, along with many district councils, offer rates remission on land that has been set aside for conservation purposes.

Conditions apply in all these situations, so contact the Waikato Regional Council and/or your local council for details.

More information

If you would like more information about whether your site is significant or how you could use, protect or restore a natural area on your property, contact your local district council first. Your SNA may also be protected under other rules or legislation (such as, the Wildlife Act). It is important to also contact the Waikato Regional Council and the Department of Conservation, if you are considering undertaking any activity that may affect the SNA.

The following organisations can also provide advice on assessing your site, pest control, protection options, or sources of funding for legal protection or restoration.

The Waikato Regional Council

Freephone 0800 800 401 or visit www.waikatoregion.govt.nz

Waikato Biodiversity Forum

Freephone 0800 BIODIV (246348) or visit www.waikatobiodiversity.org.nz



Mountain cabbage trees.



Peat bog, Pureora.



Waihora Lagoon.



Geothermal area, Wairakei.



Kopouatai Peat Dome, Hauraki.

Appendix I: Significance level with reasons and examples

Significance levels	Main reasons for significance	Site examples
Internationally significant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognised as ecologically important at an international level, such as a RAMSAR site or World Heritage Area. The best or only remaining large representative example in New Zealand of a suite of relatively intact indigenous ecosystems and ecological sequences. The sites that have been used as a key habitat for international migrating species that would be threatened if habitat was lost. Or sites that contain distinct populations of acutely threatened species or species endemic to the Waikato region. 	Tongariro National Park, Whangamarino Swamp, Kopouatai Peat Dome and the Firth of Thames estuary.
Nationally significant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognised as ecologically important at a national level. Good quality example of nationally under-represented ecosystem, or originally rare ecosystems, such as karst (limestone). The sites have been used on an ongoing basis for very threatened species, such as brown kiwi and North Island weka. 	DOC Kaimai-Mamaku Conservation Park. Ruakuri Caves and Bush Scenic Reserve.
Regionally significant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognised as ecologically important at a regional level. Good quality examples of regionally under-represented habitat types, such as our best dune systems or largest mangrove-filled estuaries. The sites contain populations of sparse species, such as longfin eel, hochstetter's frog and moko skink. 	Lake Okoroire, Tarariki Reserve in the Hauraki district, Waihou River native forest fragment.
Locally significant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These sites may not be highly significant in their own right, but can play an important part in a network of natural areas. For example, a locally significant site might be important as a seasonal feeding or breeding area, rather than habitat for threatened or sparse species. It might also act as a stepping stone between other natural areas, allowing wildlife to move around in search of food or mates. 	Areas of native habitat scrub on the foothills of the Kaimai-Mamaku range.