

Consulting on the protection of native taonga species in Whanganui National Park and Waitōtara Conservation Area

The Department of Conservation's Whanganui District plans to reduce possum, rat and stoat numbers to protect western brown kiwi, whio and forest canopy species from local extinction in the Matemateaonga - Waitōtara area.

Values

The Whanganui National Park and surrounding forest form the second largest native lowland forest remnant in the North Island.

The vast unbroken canopy of forest extending across the catchments of the Matemateaonga - Waitōtara area, supports populations of native bird species that rely on this ancient forest for their ongoing survival. This rare lowland forest remnant and the rivers that flow through the region are home to taonga such as western brown kiwi and whio (blue duck).

The ancient ngahere, cleanses and protects the quality of the water that flows through the region and retains the health of the forest for all inhabitants and beyond.

Why we are controlling possums and rodents

Possoms browse the canopy and damage the integrity of the forest. Northern rātā, kamahi and other plants are favoured by possums and the canopies of these trees are in danger of collapse. These predators must be controlled to allow the native forest to regenerate and flourish to ensure the survival of the natural inhabitants - the native birds, bats, lizards and invertebrates.



Whanganui lowland forest. Photo: DOC

Currently, possums and rats and stoats are eating birds' eggs and preying on chicks. This predation severely impacts the ability of these taonga species to survive. Controlling predators allows our native species to breed and reach adulthood.

Kiwi are long lived and slow breeding. Stoat control is known to improve kiwi survival rates. The decline of the western brown kiwi population in the Park without control is likely to be between 3 – 5% per annum. And on average stoats are responsible for the deaths of 60% of kiwi chicks in unprotected areas.

Where are we proposing to control predators?

The Department of Conservation (DOC) is planning predator control over an area of 51,298ha (see attached map) in the Whanganui National Park (Park) and Waitōtara Conservation Area.

Consultation – Have your say

DOC is continuing to consult closely with local iwi and hapū on this planned operation. It is also seeking feedback from adjacent landowners and the affected community on the effects of this control plan and would like to hear your views. We are here to listen to you.

DOC staff and/or our contractor EcoFX Limited would like to contact you at a convenient time to discuss the proposed operation; how it affects you, and what we can do to mitigate these effects.

How we are proposing to protect the area

Cereal baits containing biodegradable 1080 would be applied aerially over the planned area. Helicopters with calibrated buckets will distribute bait along pre-determined and monitored flight paths.

Use of a range of predator control methods to protect species

Aerial application of cereal pellets containing 1080 is the most effective control method over large areas. It is the only viable method in the remote, rugged terrain of the Whanganui National Park and Waitōtara Conservation Area. Ground-based trapping and bait stations are effective in smaller more accessible areas, however the number of possum/rodents and stoats can overwhelm trapping networks. In those areas aerial 1080 may be used to supplement the existing ground-based work. Aerial 1080 operations target possums and rodents. Stoats are also reduced effectively as they eat rodents/possums.

Time frame

At this stage, this operation is planned to occur during the Autumn of 2022. The operation is weather dependent.



North Island brown kiwi. Photo: Andrew Walmsley

Planning

DOC engages and works closely with iwi, for all predator control. DOC also consults with stakeholders and affected landowners.

Following feedback from this consultation, there will be decisions on what changes can be made to the operational plan to mitigate the effects of the operation on you.

DOC or our contractors will provide an update to confirm the outcomes of the consultation and any resulting changes to the operational boundary plan, and a more precise timeframe.

Also, the contractor EcoFX Limited will contact all neighbours, advertise in the local newspaper and place warning signs at entrances to public conservation land immediately prior to the operation starting.

DOC will contact iwi, landowners and affected stakeholders and the local community after the operation to inform them that the operation has been completed successfully and provide details of reduction of predator numbers. Wherever possible, DOC will also update iwi and stakeholders on the positive outcomes of the control for native species in the area.

Use of 1080 requires permission from the local Public Health Protection office of the Ministry of Health.

DOC assesses vertebrate predator control operations that use a toxin on behalf of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). DOC staff follow procedures approved by the EPA. These regulations ensure that the toxin is applied safely to safeguard the public and the environment.

Key Facts: What you need to know

1080 is a manufactured, biodegradable toxin. Its active ingredient, fluoroacetate is salt that occurs naturally in poisonous plants in Australia, Africa and Brazil. It does not accumulate. It is broken down naturally by micro-organisms, fungi and plants into harmless compounds and does not leave permanent residues in soil, water, plants or animals.

The Department of Conservation complies with all relevant regulations and takes a precautionary approach to the aerial application of biodegradable 1080.

All operations begin with an aerial pre-feed of non-toxic bait to prime possums/rodents to eat the toxic bait that will be applied afterwards.

- The toxic cereal bait pellets contain 0.15% of 1080. They are about 2 cm long, cylindrical and dyed green.
- Non-toxic pre-feed cereal pellets are about 2 cm long, cylindrical and sandy coloured (not-dyed).



Whio (blue duck). Photo: Tyrone Smith

Managing risk

1080 is poisonous to humans, domestic and game animals. Dogs are highly susceptible. In areas where the toxin has been applied, the risk to dogs will remain until poisoned carcasses have disintegrated, which can be more than six months. These risks can be eliminated by following these rules:

DO NOT touch bait

WATCH children at all times

DO NOT EAT animals from this area

Toxic baits and carcasses are **DEADLY to DOGS**

Observe these rules whenever you see warning signs about pesticides. These warning signs indicate pesticide residues may be still present in baits and animals. When signs are removed this means you can resume normal activities in the area.

For more information

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