TIMARU
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera ā-Rohe
o Te Tihi o Maru

Your Natural Heritage

SIGNIFICANT NATURAL AREAS

SPRING 2020 UPDATE

YOUR PLAN OUR FUTURE

www.timaru.govt.nz

HE WAKA EKE NOA

We are all in this together

Welcome to this second edition of the Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) update.

Over the past few months considerable work has been undertaken on SNAs around the District and there has also been a lot of work by Council staff on preparing a draft review of the Timaru District Plan – the document that provides guidance on a large range of activities across the District. Key in this review has been a strengthening of guidelines around the environment and below are some of the main points in the draft plan.

Draft District Plan – The First Cut

Council has previously consulted ratepayers on the draft provisions of the Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity chapter in May 2019.

We have now completed the first cut of the new draft District Plan for feedback. The draft District Plan is a digital plan and can be viewed from **www.timaru.govt.nz/draftplan**.

The Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity chapter aims to protect significant indigenous biodiversity, and to maintain and enhance indigenous biodiversity. To achieve these goals, the draft chapter requires resource consent for the clearance of indigenous vegetation:

- In all Significant Natural Areas
- On land above 900m in altitude
- 50m of any wetland
- 20m from any water body including springs
- 20m from mean high water springs (the coast)
- On land with an average slope of 30 degrees or greater.

The draft District Plan is a digital plan (ePlan) and can be viewed from www.timaru.govt.nz/draftplan.

Feedback can be made in writing through the ePlan feedback system between 7 October to 30 November 2020. If you would like to discuss the draft Plan in person with Council staff, you can request a meeting by ringing 03 687 7465.

For more information on the first cut of the draft District Plan and how to use the ePlan, please visit www.timaru.govt.nz/draftplan.

Landowner assistance

While Council has statutory responsibilities, it is required to meet regarding protecting biodiversity, it does not want to be unnecessarily regulatory.

To support landowners, Council has adopted a broad Biodiversity Policy incorporating a range of methods to assist landowners in a number of ways, including:

- Free ecological surveys for identifying Significant Natural Areas.
- Rate remission for properties containing an identified Significant Natural Areas.
- Financial support through the Significant Natural Areas Fund for beneficial activities such as fencing and pest control.
- Waiver of charges for resource consent involving Significant Natural Areas where protection is achieved.
- Assisting applications for covenanting and purchase to QEII Trust, Nature Heritage Fund, etc..
- Education, information, advice, and encouragement.

For more information on how we can assist you, please contact the Duty Planner at 03 687 7271.

Limestone Scarps

Management of Remnant Native Flora and Fauna Values

Background

Limestone scarp environments are an attractive, but largely under-represented land type within the Timaru District area.

These scarps in many cases support a diverse and specialised range of native plants and animals, many of them being exceedingly rare and found nowhere else. For example, at least six of those specialised limestone plants are only found in South Canterbury. These are all small herb-sized plants which can be easily over-looked.

Their continued existence in the face of land development over the years is due to several reasons, but principally:

- Most scarp areas are non-arable and not able to be cultivated.
- Many have in the past been grazed solely by sheep which are both light, have a different grazing habit to heavier classes of stock such as cattle and deer and stocking rates and grazing pressure have been generally low.
- In some cases, the scarps – or sections of them, are too steep to allow stock access and remnants have persisted in these areas.
- Sympathetic management by property owners where the remnant values are recognised.

In recent years many of the limestone scarp areas within the Timaru district have been surveyed by local ecologist Mike Harding and now more than 800 SNAs – Significant Natural Areas have been established recognising the values that remain. This work has been complemented by the work of local herpetologist and enthusiast Hermann Frank who has worked with many local landowners to raise awareness of the values and assist with their management.

Limestone Scarps

A desirable long-term goal would be to see these limestone scarps and their associated values – plants, animals and habitats conserved for future generations. This is not an easy task. The SNA designation gives some form of protection as it does not permit "clearance by any means (including burning and spraying with herbicides) or over-planting of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna". The better protection is the interest of landowners in the value of those unique habitats. Many have been intrigued to learn that parts of their property are regarded as important for the District, and proud to have threatened or notable species present.

However, in many cases even adopting a "hands off" management approach could eventually see their gradual deterioration and decline as issues with introduced weeds, pests and changing farming practices and priorities emerge.

The purpose of this sheet is to offer some management suggestions / options to owners of limestone scarps that may assist in arresting this gradual decline.

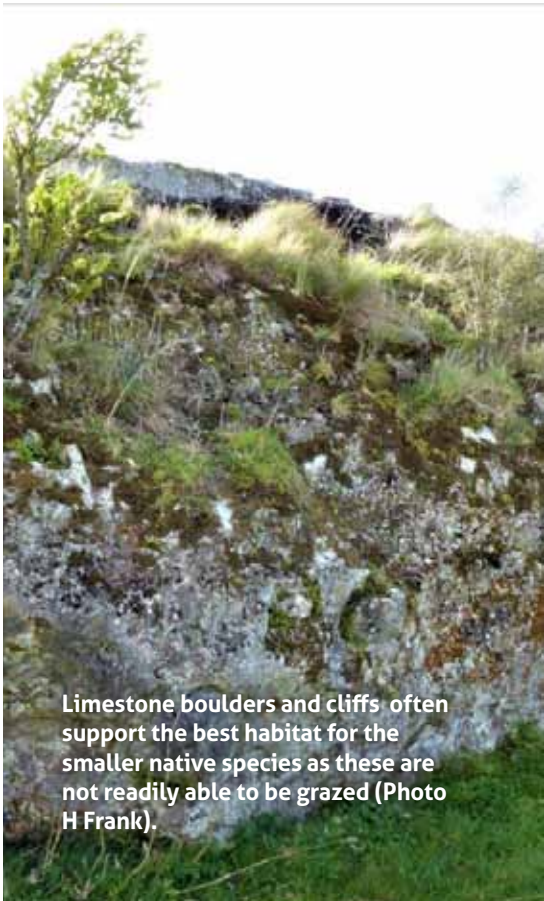
- First and foremost, an acceptance by property owners that the values are distinct and worthy of protection.
- A continuance where possible of farming practices that have seen the existing values retained so far.
- The avoidance of applications of fertiliser to the higher value remnant areas as fertiliser encourages the growth of competing grasses and weed species.
- Learning to recognise the most vulnerable native remnant species especially the smaller herbaceous plants such as Gentian, Geranium, Cardamine, Gingida and others.
- Being able to recognise weed species that have the potential to over compete with the remnant plants. In many cases these are not the traditional brush weeds gorse and broom, but include other plants such as introduced grasses, stonecrop and hawkweed.
- Undertaking targeted weed control in and around the remnants using methods that will be conducive to the retention of the remnants. Hand weeding, spot spraying with a knapsack or similar as opposed to a gun and hose or other high-pressure methods of application. Aerial weed control should not be used as this is too indiscriminate. Often a little and often is all that is needed to ensure that conditions suitable for the native plants are retained.
- Fencing out remnant areas where practical and beneficial to do so. Grants may be available to assist with this.
- Consideration of a QEII covenant as a mean of protecting areas into the future.
- Seeking specialist advice when unsure of what actions to take in the best interests of the remnants. Most agencies or individuals are happy to provide this at no cost.

For assistance or information on managing your Limestone Scarp SNAs you can contact:

- Timaru District Council
  Planning Unit 03 687 7200
- Gary Foster: 0274 310 637
- Hermann Frank: 0276 507 356

Limestone Valley scarp country showing bush remnants (Photo H Frank).

A native bittercress – Cardamine sp (white flowers) being crowded out by a weed – in this instance dandelion (Photo H Frank).



Limestone boulders and cliffs often support the best habitat for the smaller native species as these are not readily able to be grazed (Photo H Frank).

A SPECIAL PLACE

When Lisa Zwarts and Shaun Hunter first looked at their block of land at Hanging Rock just on 4 years ago the fact that it had limestone outcrops and potential for a revegetation project were positive considerations in purchasing the 17ha property.

One of the initial things they did was to get an ecological assessment of approx 1 hectare of limestone outcrops and remnant vegetation at the western end of the land undertaken resulting in an SNA being established.

Indigenous vegetation on the property comprises hardwood treeland, shrubland and sparsely vegetated rockland associated with the limestone scarp on the side of the gully and sedgeland (wetland) on the valley floor.

Now 3 and a half years later the restoration work is well underway and Lisa and Shaun will both tell you that this has been, and continues to be, a lot of hard work but immensely satisfying.

"We could see the potential of our site and are keen to do our bit to improve water quality and enhancement of the ecosystem type".

Indeed, the current tenant they have on the land is growing alternative crops and using land management practices that they also believe are helping their SNA through reduced runoff of nutrients.

Weeds and animal pest have been challenges in developing their SNA with blackberry in particular being a real issue, at times creating large mats of dense tangled growth that have to be dealt with in order to get the revegetation plantings into the ground and underway.

Coarse grasses such as Cocksfoot, plum and elderberry also have an impact, and wallaby, deer and hares along with break ins of stock from adjoining properties and their own, are all hurdles that are being dealt with along the way.

To date Lisa and Shaun have planted more than 20000 natives into their SNA the majority of which they have grown themselves. This has been undertaken by collecting "duff" (the leaf litter and decaying matter from the forest floor which also contains lots of native plant seeds) from existing bush remnant areas then mixing this with potting mix. The resulting seedlings are then pricked out when small and grown on in pots for 2 or 3 years. Planting a larger grade of plants Lisa says is valuable when combating coarse grasses such as the cocksfoot as the new plants can get above the grass from the start.

Collecting the duff from local remnants in the area ensures that the species mix is appropriate for their site, but Lisa says be sure to ask for permission before taking duff from reserve areas or private property.

Growing their own plants saves a lot of money and is part of Lisa and Shaun playing to their strengths by putting their time into growing and planting the

seedlings and then using some of their funds to employ a contractor to assist with periodic maintenance.

The pair have applied for and obtained a QEII covenant for their site primarily because of the limestone and the Maori rock art which is also present. To that end they are very appreciative of the assistance provided by the Te Ana Rock Art Trust which owns an adjoining property – Taniwha Gully, and who have provided advice especially around the management of the sites archaeological values, as well as providing other information and access to their ecologist. Having the covenant over their SNA will ensure ongoing protection for the area in perpetuity – something the pair are incredibly happy about given all the work that has gone into the area.

Ultimately their goal is to recreate a fully restored ecosystem that matches as closely as possible, the original ecotype.

At 1 hectare their SNA is not large but just the right size for them and they are quick to point out that no area is to small and every restored site contributes to the overall environmental health of our landscapes and provides connectivity allowing improved corridors for bird and other wild life movement.

"Every site is different so don't be scared to ask for advice."

Lisa and Shaun are convinced that asking around and pooling ideas is the best way to find the right solutions to your individual situation and would be keen to see an SNA Facebook page or similar setup so that questions and advise can be shared along with other initiatives such as plant exchange opportunities.

To that end they would be more than happy to meet with and have a chat to anyone considering such an undertaking to share their thoughts and knowledge.

Shaun and Lisa standing on front of their SNA. The picture shows the mats of old blackberry and grasses being cleared for future plantings while establishing plantings can be seen above this.

Dryland Ecosystems on the Plains

The dryland ecosystems of the Low Plains Ecological District southern lowlands are amongst some of the most threatened habitats in our district.

Since the early European settlement of New Zealand, the vast majority of this has been developed for arable and pastoral farming. Today less than 1% of the original land cover remains on the Canterbury Plains.

The original cover on this country included kanuka – kowhai forest / tree land or matagouri – Coprosma shrubland on stable alluvial surfaces and grassland – herbfield – mossfield on more recent surfaces.

Within the Timaru District there are very few areas of this ecotype remaining and the following articles detail two of these, both of which are located in the South Branch of the Rangitata River on Old Main South Road.

Other sites are on SH1 at Rangitata Island as well as Oliver Dryland reserve at Coopers Creek, and Belfield Dryland reserve between Belfield and Arundel that are managed and maintained by Council.

RANGITATA SOUTH STREAM SNA

In 2015 when further farm development was being undertaken Leighton and Michelle Pye were keen to retain an area for conservation, and following a survey by ecologist Mike Harding an SNA was established in the South Branch of the Rangitata River adjacent to Old Main South Road. The SNA report highlighted the value of the site as habitat for the southern grass skink.

Leighton says that they really value the fact that there is not many of these areas left any longer and therefor enjoy preserving and developing an area of lizard habitat and an area for native plant species to grow. It adds he says, a different aspect to the farm which is a bit of a talking point. It also provides balance between farming the land and allowing the original landscape to be present.

There have been and continue to be challenges involved in the restoration of the SNA and in 2019 the floods which swept down the South Branch almost completely destroyed the SNA. Currently Leighton and Michelle along with team members Josie and Mary are going forward with a 4 to 5 year planting plan focussing on the higher areas which may not be so affected in any potential future flooding events.

The plan involves replanting smaller areas over this time frame to allow them to keep on top of maintenance and ensuring that each area is well established before planting the next. The plan also provides for building up the boulder island which provides improved habitat for the lizards which are often seen at the site

Aside from that there are the normal challenges of getting plants to establish, pest control and weed control. Their aim is to give the plants the best start by ensuring correct site preparation and planting locally occurring species that are adapted to the rocky soils to ensure good establishment rates. Pest control involves using plat protection devices as combi guards and netting to stop rabbit damage. Weed control is labour intensive with spraying and cutting out gorse and broom which tend to get away and overcrowd the site. Maintaining the new plantings and clearing the gorse and broom is the most physical aspect of the SNA development project.

A pivot which runs through the area can apply water if required to ensure there is enough soil moisture for the plants.

Plants being used in the planting programme include silver tussock, porcupine shrub – Melicytus alpinus, , pohuehue - Meuhlenbeckia axillaris and complexa, , toitoi – Austroderia richardii, , Hebe salicifolia, Mingimingi – Coprosman propinqua, Tree Daisy – Olearia avicennifolia, Kanuka – Kunzea ericoides, South Island kowhai – Sophora microphylla, and Cabbage Tree – Cordyline australis.

The end result Leighton says is to see the area fully developed and thriving as well as being able to see lizards when visiting the site. It would be great to get to a point where the area no longer needs as much input and can regenerate on its own.

Leighton, Michelle and their team would encourage others to have a go at a similar project. Embrace the area of you have one on farm and be proud of the efforts you are putting in to maintain it. Having a long-term plan in place is a really good start as you know what needs to be done going forward and can include this within farm budgets. Ensure your plan is spread over a few years and don't try to develop the area all in one go as this will create too much work to keep on top of with maintenance and pest / weed control. Also be aware of the funding opportunities provided to assist landowners with these projects.

Leighton, Mary and Josie on their SNA at Old Main South Road.

OLD MAIN SOUTH RD SURVIVOR

On the downstream side of Old Main South Rd in the South Branch of the Rangitata lies one of the larger remaining dryland remnants remaining within the Timaru District. The area of some 15 hectares is administered by Land Information New Zealand.

A survey undertaken in 2011 by ecologist Mike Harding shows vegetation at the site comprises areas of indigenous mossfield and grassland with scattered patches of exotic (gorse – dominated) shrubland and scrub. The site has not been cultivated or subject to intensive land uses and as such represents a rare example of lowland alluvial surface at which indigenous mosses, herbs and grasses have been able to survive or recolonize.

Species present include 3 native mosses – Racomitrium pruinosum, Hypnum cupressiforme and Polytrichum juniperinum, lichens - predominantly Cladia aggregata and grasses the most important of which is Rytidosperma sp. Additionally creeping pohuehue – Meuhlenbeckia axillaris, patotara – Leucopogon fraserii, and Cabbage tree – Cordyline australis are present.

Adjoining landowner Russell Brodie, whose family have lived on Rangitata Island since the 1870s, has many fond memories of the area and says he spent a lot of time there in his childhood years exploring, digging holes and generally having fun.

Russell knows of at least one Maori Hangi pit in the SNA and believes that careful examination of the site may well reveal more. Also, in the 1940s a Maori skeleton was unearthed at the site following a flood. The pit and skeleton point to earlier use of this area by local Maori.

Russell says that having lived here all his life his eyes to this area were really opened when he spoke to ecologist Mike Harding during the SNA survey process and became aware of the range and diversity of the remnant native flora at the site which includes a rare occurrence of kanuka – Kunzea ericoides and a small population of the "at risk" declining species Meuhlenbeckia epherdroides.

The pohuehue or Meuhlenbeckia species are widely recognised as being host plants for a large range of native moths, butterflies and invertebrates as well as proving food and habitat for lizards and birds.

Since the early 2000s dairy expansion and development in the general area has seen similar areas cleared for pasture so that this area is now virtually the largest site remaining.

Russell is keen to see this site more widely recognised for what it is and that it be retained for future generations as a resource and reminder of what much of the Canterbury Plains once looked like.

A selection of mosses onsite

patotara – Leucopogon fraserii

Russell Brodie standing next to some old remnant Kanuka on the SNA

QEII Covenants

QEII Covenants Q&A with local representative Rob Smith

What is a QEII covenant?

These are areas that have been identified as areas of special interest. These are usually areas that have significant biodiversity but may also include scenic values as well as archaeological values. They are registered against the title on the land and usually are forever.

Is there a limit on size – too big, too small?

The smallest of our covenants usually start at the 1ha size but most are larger, there is no real limit on size (some of larger covenants are over 1000ha) and some of our smaller ones are less than 1ha as well.

What are the general sort of eligibility criteria?

Like everyone we have finite resources and while we would like to help nearly everyone to ensure that their area remains special, we do prioritise. If your area has been identified as a significant natural area (SNA) then this greatly improves its chances of being approved as a covenant. For other area which are not SNAs they may also be worthy of a covenant (large limestone escarpments for their scenic values for instance). Revegetation projects can also be eligible but only after usually many years have been put into their creation and they become self-sustaining.

Who do people contact to make an enquiry?

If you think that your area is special, and you want it to stay that way, the initial conversation begins with your local QEII representative.

For the Timaru District this is Rob Smith: **rsmith@qeii.org.nz**

What are the benefits of a covenant?

The largest benefit by far is the knowledge that the area will remain as a protected area for ever. This means that the area is registered against the title and it will be checked on a regular basis by the local rep to ensure that the original intent of the covenantor are honoured. This obviously applies after the area has been sold onto a different party from the original owners. People know that their efforts in fencing, weed control and pest control will remain forever. Timaru District Council along with many other councils also offer rates relief on the land. Covenanted land also can attract more favourable funding by other parties who donate money and expertise as the agencies know that the effort put into the area will be looked after in perpetuity.

This assistance can be financially very significant and the likes of Environment Canterbury, Timaru District Council and Mid and South Canterbury Community Trust have donated considerable funds to covenants safe in the knowledge that their funds will not be wasted with a change of ownership.

What assistance is QEII able to provide to owners?

We like to help as much as we can. This can be in the form of helping towards fencing, advice on aspects of covenant management and often a good sounding board about the landowners aspirations for their land. We often act as an agency to allow other bodies like ECan and TDC to contribute towards the covenant as well.

How long does the evaluation and acceptance process take?

The proverbial how long is a piece of string question.... The shortest time that I have managed from initial enquiry to complete registration was four months in the Timaru District, I think that's as quick as anywhere in New Zealand. The process starts with the landowner asking about their area, at least one visit and chat with the rep, a proposal is written up by the rep, then sent to the landowner to check and approve, then the proposal is sent to Wellington office of QEII for further write up, the board approves the covenant, the surveyor is contacted if the boundaries are already defined (ie the fence is complete) the survey is approved by the landowner and the rep, the covenant document is sent out and signed by all affected parties, then finally registered on the title. On the other end there are covenants that are still gradually getting there after five plus years.... these possible covenants often are held up for many reasons.

What obligations does this place on landowners?

The founding document determines the landowners obligations and thus is a really important document to get right for everyone and so we are not in any hurry to covenant a property until everyone is happy about the conditions and what is expected. However typically this will involve stock exclusion and maintaining fences. This is a tricky question really as each covenant is unique.

What costs are involved?

QEII will pay for the survey costs and often assists with fencing as well. We believe strongly that a landowner needs to contribute towards the cost of the fence as the fence does belong to the landowner NOT QEII. The landowner is responsible for maintaining the fence, so it is in both of our interests that the fence is built once and built right. However, if the covenant is a result of a subdivision process then the costs are borne by the subdivider.

Why do people covenant?

There is assistance in fencing off that tricky gully, it helps with farm management, it allows for the bush to regenerate once stock are excluded and thus the bush will not be lost eventually. However as well as this, most people covenant because they want to make a difference, they see covenanting as one of the few things that they can do that will last forever and that the area they treasure will looked at by all their successive generations and know that they had their interests at heart long after they have gone. Aotearoa is a richer place by having such landowners and we all benefit from their attitude.

Questions or queries

If you have any questions or queries relating to Significant Natural Areas, then do not hesitate to contact the Planning Unit at the Timaru District Council by calling 03 687 7200.

Gary Foster who is assisting the planning Unit on a part time independent basis may also be able to help and can be contacted on 0274 310 637.


OLIVER DRYLAND RESERVE
NOREWHAN MEETS THE EYE
Background
Ecotype
Flora & Fauna

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YOUR PLAN OUR FUTURE
TIMARU DISTRICT PLAN REVIEW

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