

Versatile Soils

Issues

- Versatile soils are an important physical resource within the District. Some subdivision, land use and development activities may compromise its ongoing ability to be used productively.
- The approach taken in the Operative Plan focuses more on particular activities, rather than focusing on potential effects on the versatile soil resource.
- The current mapping of versatile soils does not align with Environment Canterbury's more up-to-date mapping of Class 1 and 2 soils.

Operative District Plan Approach

The Operative Plan manages versatile soils by identifying Class 1 and 2 soils (under the land use capability classification system) as the Rural 2 Zone. Many of the rules for activities are the same in both the Rural 1 and Rural 2 zones. However, some activities are managed more stringently in the Rural 2 Zone, and in particular, more non-farming activities trigger a non-complying activity status. Notwithstanding the separate zoning, the objective and policy framework is not specific to each rural zone, although it does seek to discourage development that would result in irreversible adverse effects on versatile soils.

The current approach therefore limits the range of activities that can be undertaken within the Rural 2 Zone, rather than providing a framework more focused on the effects of activities on the versatility of the soils. In particular, restricting a range of activities does not take into account that depending on their exact nature, they may not have irreversible adverse effects on the versatility of the soil, or may be appropriate to support farming activities.



Figure 1: Example of zoning – Rural 2 (R2) in bright green, Rural 1 (R1) elsewhere.

Draft Plan Approach

The Draft Plan proposes to identify Versatile Soils using an overlay, with the underlying zoning (General Rural or Rural Lifestyle) being the same as other rural areas that are not Class 1 and 2 soils.

Using this approach, activities within the Overlay are managed under the zoning, but with additional controls added where they are considered necessary to appropriately protect versatile soils.

The approach does not alter the activity status for various different activities, including earthworks and subdivision, from that of the underlying General Rural or Rural Lifestyle zoning.

However, where activities require resource consent under the zone rules, or under the earthworks or subdivision rules, and are located within the Overlay, the application will be subject to additional consideration regarding the effects on the versatile soil resource. This is intended to ensure that the consideration of such applications is more clearly targeted to potential effects of an activity on versatile soils.

It is also proposed to introduce a site coverage limit for impervious surfaces within the Versatile Soil Overlay to address the potential effects of site coverage on the versatile soils resource. This is because that there are no site coverage limits applying under the zone rules; and impervious surfaces can reduce the area of versatile soils available for farming activities.

Changes

Key changes include:

Class 1 and 2 soils under the LUC classification are included within the Versatile Soils Overlay. This overlay is based on Environment Canterbury's soil mapping, rather than the more dated Rural 2 zoning in the Operative Plan

Within the Versatile Soils Overlay, activities are managed according to the relevant underlying zoning of the site and the district-wide rules applying

Where a resource consent requirement is triggered under the zoning rules, or within the earthworks or subdivision rules, additional objective and policy guidance specific to versatile soils will apply and will guide consideration of applications and ensure the potential effects on the versatile soil resource are considered

A site coverage limit is included for impervious surfaces within the versatile soil overlay, to address the potential effects of site coverage on the versatile soils resource

Policy direction is included in relation to expansion of urban activities or Rural Lifestyle zoning into the Versatile Soil Overlay.

Reasons

The Draft Plan uses zones to identify areas that have a similar purpose, character and qualities. This reflects that rural areas containing versatile soils have the same general purpose, character and qualities as other areas within the General Rural or Rural Lifestyle zones. The Versatile Soils Overlay then recognise areas with a particular natural resource that requires additional, targeted management. The approach is intended to better recognise that various activities may affect the soils resource, but that it will depend on the particular nature of the activity as to whether it will have irreversible adverse effects on the versatility of the soil. For example, the extent of coverage, compaction or removal of versatile land that may result from a non-farming activity, and whether the activity is needed to support farming activities. Aligning the Overlay with Environment Canterbury's soil mapping ensures more up-to-date information is used to target the provisions to the appropriate areas.

What it Means in Practice

- A site coverage limit will apply within the Versatile Soil Overlay. This will limit the amount of buildings and other impervious surfaces within the overlay area or trigger a resource consent requirement where an exceedance is proposed
- The mapping of the Versatile Soil Overlay will align with more up-to-date information, resulting in the controls being better targeted to the soil resource
- With the exception of site coverage, no additional resource consents will be triggered within the Versatile Soils Overlay; however, where a consent requirement is triggered, the potential impact on the versatile soil resource can be considered and managed.

