

TIMARU



DISTRICT COUNCIL

Te Kaunihera ā-Rohe
o Te Tihi o Maru

Your Natural Heritage

SIGNIFICANT NATURAL AREAS

February 2020 Update



YOUR PLAN OUR FUTURE

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HE WAKA EKE NOA

We are all in this together

Welcome to this update on Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) in the Timaru District.

The SNA programme has been in operation now within the Timaru District since 2005 and a considerable amount of work is being undertaken by landowners, volunteers, contractors and Council to ensure the long term protection of indigenous flora and habitat values within these areas.

There is however a variable level of knowledge about how the programme came about or what SNAs are and hopefully the information below will help to clarify the situation.

What is a Significant Natural Area?

An SNA is an area of land with naturally occurring vegetation containing plant species that are indigenous (native) to the area / site and which have been assessed as having sufficient qualities / values to warrant its long term protection. SNAs can also include significant habitats of indigenous fauna, which are habitats (indigenous / exotic) that provide habitats for indigenous species (animals, birds and invertebrates).

The Resource Management Act 1991 requires all local authorities in New Zealand to recognise and provide for the protection of these areas as a matter of national importance. It also requires local authorities to control any actual or potential effects of the use, development or protection of land for the purpose of the maintenance of indigenous biodiversity.

Work on identifying these areas within the Timaru District was undertaken by local Geraldine ecologist Mike Harding between 2005 and 2016.

At the completion of the survey 772 SNA sites covering an area of 7,260 hectares had been identified and recorded as being significant and worthy of protection.

These SNAs cover a range of land and ecosystem types within the District from the coast to the mountains and include coastal wetlands, lowland grassland, limestone scarp, basalt boulder field, downlands forest, old growth podocarp forest in the foothills valleys, regenerating forest on hill slopes, inland wetlands and tussock land on moraine.

Within these SNAs there is a huge diversity of indigenous flora and fauna with populations of nine “threatened” and 21 “at risk” plant and animal species including long tailed bat and a locally endemic limestone gentian.

These SNA areas represent the best of what remains of our native flora ecosystems and fauna habitats on privately owned land within the Timaru District.

What does having an SNA on my property mean?

The purpose of identifying an SNA is to assist landowners and Council to effectively manage the indigenous flora and fauna values / habitats identified so that they can be retained in good health in perpetuity.

Many SNA areas remain only because good land management practised by farmers and others to the present time has minimised the impact of land uses on these values.

The formal assessment and recording of the SNA areas / values allows all parties concerned to collectively better identify any potential threats, refine management practices appropriately, and undertake enhancements or improvements.

Land management is constantly changing with new techniques and opportunities arising, an ever increasing range of plant and animal pests making their way to our shores and the growing requirement around environmental and compliance issues that need to be addressed.

All of these place certain obligations on the land owner, however having an identified SNA on your property meets one of the land compliance requirements and is a great head start to better acknowledging and managing our natural heritage values.

In many cases these natural heritage values are what attracted us to our properties in the first instance and in a world where increasing pressure is constantly being placed upon what remains we can expect

that any land on which these values are present and being well managed will continue to be attractive not only to its current owners but for future potential buyers should you ever consider selling.

As you would expect clearance of an SNA (including burning, spray with herbicides, or over planting) will require you to apply for consent.

Having an SNA on your property does not mean that the public have any rights of access to these areas or that you are in any way required to provide for this.

Council will from time to time arrange to visit your SNA to discuss with you any concerns you may have and where possible pass on tips, management techniques or information learnt from other SNA property owners that may be of value to you in your situation.

Additionally Council can further assist with contestable grants, rates remissions on SNA areas and in some instances may undertake pest plant control work on your SNA where this falls within the priorities set by the Ecosystems and Indigenous Bio Diversity Steering Group.

Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity Steering Group

This group has been formed to allow Council to receive input from various stakeholders to Council biodiversity initiatives.

Representatives on the steering group include, Council planning and management staff, environmental consultant (Mike Harding), Department of Conservation, Fish and Game, Environment Canterbury, Forest and Bird, Federated Farmers, landowners, QE11 National Trust and the forest industry.

The Council is committed to achieving the protection and enhancement of indigenous biodiversity values within the District and the steering group helps by ensuring that information provided comes from a wide cross section of the community and will lead to decisions being made that are informed, have a broad and inclusive focus and meet the requirements of Council Biodiversity Policy.

Biodiversity Funding and Current Work Programme

A focus of biodiversity funding over the past 12 months has been on limestone scarp land areas within the district. Council has spent approximately \$140,000 over the past two years conducting plant pest control work on limestone scarps.

Limestone scarps represent only a small proportion of the land area within the Timaru District but are host to a range of indigenous natives not found on other soil or land types due to the very high calcium content of their growing environment. These particular indigenous plants represent some of the rarer species in the District and nationally. Indeed the Pareora limestone gentian (*Gentianella calcis* subsp.taiko) is the most threatened plant in the Timaru District. It is extremely rare, endemic to South Canterbury and critically threatened by habitat loss and grazing.

The work being undertaken by Council in conjunction with property owners on these limestone scarps is aimed at reducing competition from weeds in particular stonecrop, Mouse-ear hawkweed and chewings fescue which if left unchecked would eventually smother and kill many of these. Additionally a range of other weeds such as barberry, wild plum, elderberry and kashia berry are also being targeted at some sites to prevent their further spread throughout these sensitive environments.

Such control however is not a one-hit wonder and will require ongoing vigilance and control measures to ensure that long-term success is achieved



Kennedy Lange (Contractor) surveys a large limestone boulder with the weed stonecrop establishing on it



Pareora limestone gentian (Photo H Frank)



Hermann Frank weeding stonecrop from a limestone boulder

Contestable Grants

Part of the annual Council biodiversity budget is made available in the form of contestable grants (upon application and approval) to assist and actively encourage landowners and members of the Timaru District community to manage, protect and enhance SNAs.

This may include items such as fencing to exclude stock or people, weed and pest control projects, enhancement projects such as replanting with approved species to complement those already present and covenanting projects that will provide permanent legal protection for these areas.

Application for these funds will be open for a month from the 1 August each year and currently \$30,000 is the annual available budget. The maximum grant is up to \$10,000. A landowner's contribution will generally be up to 50% of the total project costs. Where applications received exceed the budget Council has, the funding will be prioritised taking into account the ecological significance of the site, the ecological values that will be protected by the project, the likely benefits and outcomes, the urgency of the project, the sustainability of the project and the landowner's contribution.

The application period will be advertised by public notice and SNA owners will also receive individual notification.

The following accounts give some background to SNAs at Orari Gorge Station and Ribbonwood Rd, Geraldine where two recent significant natural areas grants have been utilised to good effect.

ORARI GORGE STATION

At 537 hectares and comprising 28 separate areas the SNAs on Orari Gorge Station account for almost 13.5% of the total farm area.

Amazingly diverse these SNAs contain over 140 recorded native plant species including the nationally endangered scrambling broom (*Carmichaelia kirkii*) and more than 20 locally uncommon species. Collectively these represent some of the most ecologically important SNA sites not only within the Timaru District but also regionally.

Station owners and managers Rosa, Graham, Robert and Alex are very positive about the SNA areas on the property which from day one has been managed in a manner that has conserved significant areas of indigenous native ecosystems. Indeed one SNA area known as the “One Hundred Pound Bush” was preserved from harm by the first owners of the property in 1858 who threatened a fine of £100 to any person removing timber from the forest.

There are some especially fine podocarps on the property including kahikatea, totara, matai, beech forest and some diverse forms of South Island Kowhai, seed of which has been collected from here for storage in the national seed bank.

The SNA areas provide rich habitat for over 14 species of native birds including the eastern falcon – *kārearea* – which nests and breeds here.

Pests, especially pest plants, are an ongoing battle and significant effort is expended

in the war against these. Most notable amongst these are sycamore, wattle, Darwin’s barberry and hawthorn. Every year thousands of dollars and countless hours of effort are directed at reducing the impact these plants have on the property and good progress has been made. The war however will be a long one but Rosa, Graham, Robert and Alex are totally committed to this as a means of protecting something they feel very passionate about. They work closely with many agencies such as ECan and Dept of Conservation and groups including the Orari River Protection Group. During the past growing season a grant from the Timaru District Council’s SNA fund was gratefully received allowing further work to be undertaken on wattle and sycamore in a couple of key areas. This has complemented other pest plant control work being undertaken elsewhere on the property.

Rosa says they feel very positive about their SNA areas and their duty of care towards the property is one they are extremely mindful of.



Alex and Rosa at the site of wattle control work.

GEM ON RIBBONWOOD ROAD, GERALDINE

Five and a half years ago when Trevor Weir and Mary Furness bought their property on Ribbonwood Road at Geraldine the podocarp/hardwood native bush remnant was a feature they were immediately drawn to feeling that it added considerably to the attractiveness of the property.

Trevor could also see that it would provide him with a challenge to get his teeth into.

Darwin's barberry, hawthorn and blackberry were the main pest plants at that time but today these have been banished from the site and both Trevor and Mary now enjoy a much lighter work load in the maintenance of their bush area which includes a path that they welcome walkers on the Geraldine Downs to use and enjoy. Feedback from everyone has been extremely positive.

At 0.6ha that area contains a diverse range of natives with 43 indigenous plant species having been recorded here. A standout feature of the SNA are the podocarps totara and kahikatea, and some nice examples of rohutū (*Lophomyrtus obcordata*) and pokaka (*Eleocarpus hookerianus*), but Trevor and Mary love all the trees and especially the wineberry when it flowers, pepper trees for their foliage and the beautiful white native *Clematis paniculata*. Several species of ferns inhabit the shady bush floor.

A varied birdlife is also found here with tui, bellbird, kereru, fantail, rifleman, brown creeper, and silvereye all regulars and Trevor has observed lizards in the bush. The Geraldine Downs area is also a known habitat for the nationally endangered pekapeka – long tailed bat.

A recent grant from the Timaru District Council's SNA fund has enabled Trevor and Mary to plant a number of larger grade kahikatea trees into the area and while Trevor admits he is never going to see them reach maturity he is happy knowing that future generations will enjoy the benefits they bring.

They are enthusiastic about the area being a recorded SNA as this will ensure that it is retained in perpetuity and can act as a long term carbon sink as it continues to grow and develop.

“Trevor and Mary now enjoy a much lighter work load in the maintenance of their bush area which includes a path that they welcome walkers on the Geraldine Downs to use and enjoy.”



Trevor and Mary at their Ribbonwood Road SNA

Rates remissions

Landowners with SNAs can apply to Council for the remission of rates on land areas contained within SNAs. This is a straight forward process and application can be made in writing or via email to donna.cross@timdc.govt.nz

Any application should provide sufficient detail to accurately identify your property such as valuation number and property ID all of which are contained on the rates accounts you receive. In addition you should also quote the number/s for any and all SNAs on your property to further identify the specific areas for which rates remissions are being sought. The SNA number/s will be found on the report provided to you by Council at the time your SNAs were assessed. If you need assistance in obtaining this number/s then please do not hesitate to contact Council.

Want to know more or need help?

If you have any queries at all relating to any aspect of an SNA on your property then please do not hesitate to contact Council's Planning Unit.

Their staff will be able to answer your queries or arrange for someone to visit and discuss things with you.

Council's contact number is 03 687 7200.



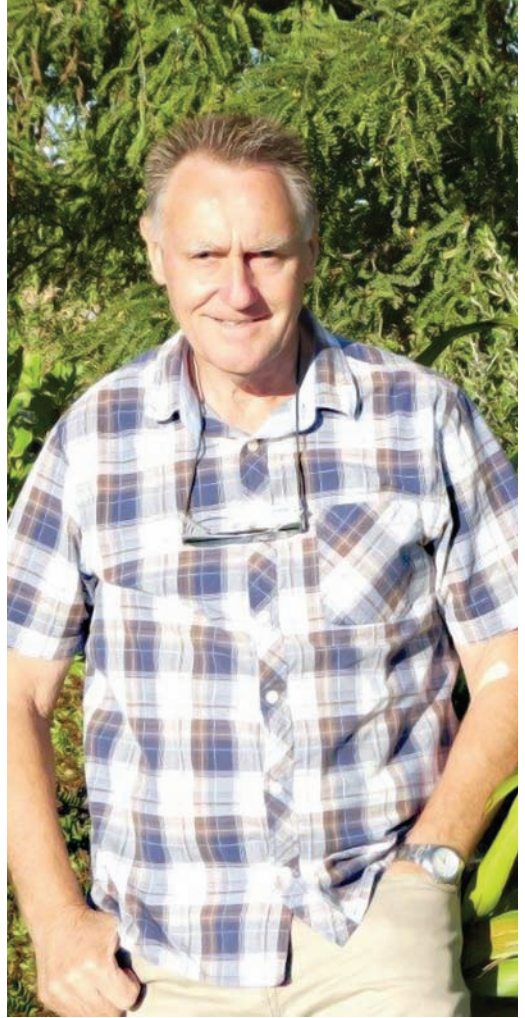
Liaising with stakeholders

For the next few months Gary Foster will be working with the Planning Unit on an independent part-time basis to liaise with property owners and other agencies involved in managing and maintaining SNAs across the District.

This includes working with contractors and landowners to implement the limestone scarp pest plant control works, assisting with any queries that landowners may have around this programme, providing information to land owners to enable them to seek rates remissions on these areas, seeking additional funding sources to allow more enhancement work to be undertaken and looking at opportunities for volunteers' involvement and education around SNAs.

Gary comes from a horticultural, biodiversity and contract management background and would be more than happy to assist with any queries you may have.

His contact number is 0274 310 637.



Would you like to receive further SNA updates via email?

If so then please provide your email details to Megan Geng at the Council's Planning unit:

Megan.geng@timdc.govt.nz



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Cover photo: High limestone cliffs and bush remnants,
Taiko, Limestone Valley, looking south.

Image courtesy of Hermann Frank.