

Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity

Issues

- A directive policy approach to protection of biodiversity values and provisions focused on protecting Significant Natural Areas (SNAs)
- Ensuring that the criteria for assessing ecological significance are up to date and there is a comprehensive list of SNAs within the District Plan
- Control of all related activities impacting on biodiversity values e.g. planting of pest plant species
- Avoidance of duplication of provisions for works from both ECan and TDC.

Operative District Plan Approach

The Operative District Plan does not list sites of significant indigenous vegetation, neither does it identify SNAs on its planning maps.

The Plan includes definitions of Significant Indigenous Vegetation and Significant Habitats of Indigenous Fauna which include broad areas such as coastal wetlands, shrublands as well as individual shrubs across large areas of the District i.e. the Plains, soft rock hills and downs and intermontane and mountain ranges.

The rules relating to indigenous vegetation clearance only apply in the Rural Zones and rely on site by site identification of indigenous vegetation when any clearance is proposed.

Proposed Plan Approach

The criteria for significance are aligned with those in the Canterbury Regional Policy Statement, and the SNAs are identified on the planning maps and in a schedule to the chapter.

The objective and policy framework are intended to provide clear direction on protection as a matter of national importance and for general maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity values across the district to meet the needs of people and communities, as well as set out the approach to assessing and managing biodiversity values.

It is proposed to utilise a dual method of dealing with biodiversity values, recognising that many areas are now known through the SNA assessments, while some areas remain unidentified but likely to contain significant values. Strict rules can be applied to the identified SNAs and a case specific approach to the unknown areas to enable appropriate assessment when biodiversity values may be affected by activities.

The key activities to be managed are those that will or could damage biodiversity values and primarily include removal of indigenous vegetation and earthworks within SNAs as a non-complying activity. Some activities are to be permitted e.g. the removal of pest plant species and customary harvest.

Changes

Key changes include:

Updated objectives and policies that address the identification and protection of SNAs, and maintenance and enhancement generally, and recognition of Ngāi Tahu values.

Summary of key rules

Permitted activities

- customary harvest
- maintenance of existing activities e.g. tracks
- ancillary clearance e.g. under forestry
- clearance within improved pasture

Restricted discretionary activities

- indigenous vegetation clearance close to wetlands, the coast, waterbodies and springs, as well as over 900m in altitude or on slopes over 300
- clearance of vegetation in the long-tailed bat protection area (mapped)

Non-complying activities

- indigenous vegetation clearance and earthworks in SNAs
- planting of potential pest species

Reasons

The Council has a responsibility to maintain indigenous biological diversity and to recognise and provide for the protection of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna under s6 of the Resource Management Act.

The District contains a diverse range of habitats that support indigenous flora and fauna. The District's lowlands have been significantly modified by urban growth, farming activities and rural residential development. Much of the indigenous vegetation habitat has been removed and these areas are identified in the Land Environments of New Zealand Threatened Environment Classification as either acutely or chronically threatened environments, having less than 20% indigenous vegetation remaining. Many highly important species are also resident in the area and require protection e.g. long-tailed bat communities.

What it Means in Practice

- Many SNAs will be identified on the planning maps making it easier for landowners to determine which, if any rules, in the Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity chapter apply to their land and proposed activities on the land
- The rules are clear and simple to understand
- The focus on the areas identified as having significance means that some activities that are currently permitted will require resource consent under the proposed provisions
- There will be greater overall protection of biodiversity values within the District.