

18. CONSERVATION SITES

18.1 Introduction

Conservation Sites are significant areas of Wellington's natural heritage, which require protection. The schedule included in this section of the Plan provides specific details of each Conservation Site. They represent a cross-section of the ecosystems found within Wellington. Identifying an area as a Conservation Site is the beginning of a process of raising the profile and protection given to areas of ecological significance or their natural heritage values - such as wildlife, native bush remnants, wetlands, coastal flax communities and herb fields - found within urban and rural Wellington. Some, particularly bush remnants, are already protected through reserve status (for example, Trelissick Park and Otari Native Botanic Garden and scenic reserves). In time, the many varied and distinctive ecosystems found in the District will be represented in its Conservation Sites.

The areas currently identified are not the sum total of natural heritage or ecologically significant areas, but represent only a start to the process. Council intends to review and add to this list to ensure that ecologically important areas of Wellington are managed and their values protected. More sites will be added over time as the research base expands.

Although some "natural" values are present in even highly modified areas, such as grassed playing fields, this section of the District Plan focuses on significant components of indigenous and native ecosystems. These could be a habitat for a particular species or a rare species itself (regardless of the habitat it is living in or an entire ecosystem).

Special provisions are contained in Section 4 of the Resource Management Act which exempt the Department of Conservation from requirements in the District Plan to obtain land-use consent for work or activities within areas it manages.

Many of the sites identified are in public ownership managed by the Council or organisations such as the Department of Conservation. Others are on private land. Council considers it appropriate to control activities in both cases. Council appreciates that some recognition should be given to the impact of controls over private land, and to this end will work towards providing appropriate assistance to secure the ecological values of such sites.

On privately owned sites, existing uses can continue until such time as an agreement with the landowner is reached to secure the future survival of these sites. Many Conservation Sites also have important and long-standing recreation and education roles which should continue subject to maintaining the conservation values.

18.1.1 Ecological Significance

Ecological significance is defined as those attributes that make a certain site or area ecologically important, or of consequence, to the Wellington district. It follows that if an area is nationally or regionally important, it will also be of significance to the district.

A site may be ecologically important in its own right, or for its potential to facilitate the development, protection or linkage of identified high ecological values.

The selection of significant sites is guided by the criteria outlined below. Where criteria can be combined (for example, one large site combining the ecosystems rather than small sites), the overall level of "significance" will be greater.

Rarity

- The area contains or is regularly used by nationally or regionally threatened species or the sole population of a species (including seral or exotic vegetation).
- The area contains ecosystem types or habitats that are rare or threatened.

Diversity

- The area contains a high degree of diversity (of ecosystem features).

Distinctiveness

- Modification by human impact or human-introduced agents is low.
- The area contains an uninterrupted ecological sequence or gradient (for example, from coast to inland range top).
- The area contains an indigenous ecosystem that is typical of a region's ecology but that is under-represented in protected land status (nationally or regionally).

Continuity and linkage

- The area is contiguous with, or in close proximity to, other protected areas.
- The area has an important role in providing links between natural areas.
- The area has the potential to act as a buffer zone to a protected area, or to have a buffer zone added.

National and regional importance

- The area is identified as being of national or regional importance in established conservation data bases (for example, Protected Natural Area surveys, Regional Policy Statement, Conservation Resource Inventory and Sites of Special Wildlife Interest) or in the Conservation Management Strategy.

Size

- Larger-sized sites are normally more likely to be viable in the long term and to have greater ecosystem or habitat diversity.

Viability

- The area has the potential to be ecologically sustainable if human impact is minimised (a combination of Size, Diversity and Distinctiveness).
- Modification is easily redressed by natural processes.

Other

- The area has formal access.
- The area provides access to other protected areas.
- Protection is likely to offer further conservation benefits, for example, raised public awareness.
- The area is capable of, or is, being physically protected.
- Pest species in the area can be controlled.
- The area has the potential for species, habitat or ecosystem restoration.

18.2 Conservation Site Objectives and Policies

OBJECTIVE

18.2.1 To maintain and enhance indigenous and part indigenous habitats and ecosystems, especially those classified as Conservation Sites, by protecting them from modification and loss.

POLICIES

To achieve this objective, Council will:

- 18.2.1.1 Raise the awareness of the ecological features of Wellington's natural environment by defining ecologically valuable sites on public and private land as Conservation Sites.**
- 18.2.1.2 Work to address conservation aims by progressively addressing privately and publicly owned Conservation Sites through a Conservation Strategy.**
- 18.2.1.3 Control the effects of uses and activities that could modify or disrupt the ecosystems of Conservation Sites or adversely affect adjoining areas or the amenity values of Conservation Sites, by requiring any such use or activity to obtain a resource consent.**
- 18.2.1.4 Recognise the value of public access to and recreational use of publicly owned Conservation Sites provided that such use does not significantly damage or disrupt the Site's ecosystems.**

METHODS

- Rules
- Operational activities (conservation strategy, reserve management plans)
- Advocacy

Around Wellington there are many areas, important for conservation purposes, that need to be secured for their present or future value. Rules have therefore been included in the Plan to protect ecological values. There may be circumstances where it is inappropriate for Council to restrict the use of private land. Through a Conservation Strategy that offers incentives of varying types, on a case-by-case basis, it is envisaged that ecological values will be progressively conserved and will become assets rather than liabilities for landowners.

As well as identification as a Conservation Site in the District Plan, areas of public land can be further protected by legislation such as the Conservation Act 1987 and the Reserves Act 1977.

Rules to restrict activities that impact on Conservation Sites, both externally and internally, are designed to maintain the natural values associated with the sites by protecting them from destruction or damage.

The environmental result will be the enhancement of ecological and conservation values in Wellington over time, as the number of Conservation Sites protected by the Plan increases

