

9. *Islands*

9.1 OVERVIEW

Description

There are nine islands in Wellington Conservancy: Somes, Ward and Mokopuna in Wellington Harbour; Taputeranga in Island Bay; and on the west coast, Mana, Kapiti, and the three small islands off Kapiti, Motungarara, Tokomapuna and Tahoramaurea.

The Department manages Kapiti, Mana, Ward, Somes and Mokopuna Islands.

None of the islands are unmodified, having been affected by human settlement and agriculture. Rehabilitation efforts to re-establish indigenous flora and fauna communities are under way on most of them.

Values

- Islands offer unique opportunities for the conservation of indigenous species, due to the ability to eradicate predators and competitors of indigenous species now found on the mainland. Kapiti and Mana are of both international and national importance as refuges for threatened species and as places where people can see and learn about indigenous species.
- The threatened indigenous bird, insect, reptile and plant species established on the islands.
- The cultural and spiritual significance of the islands, and specific sites on the islands of importance to tangata whenua.
- The historical associations of the islands and sites specific to European settlement and New Zealand history since 1840.
- Importance of the islands in the landscapes of the southern and western areas of the Conservancy, in the identity of the Porirua and Kapiti Coast communities, and in the character of Wellington Harbour and Wellington South Coast.

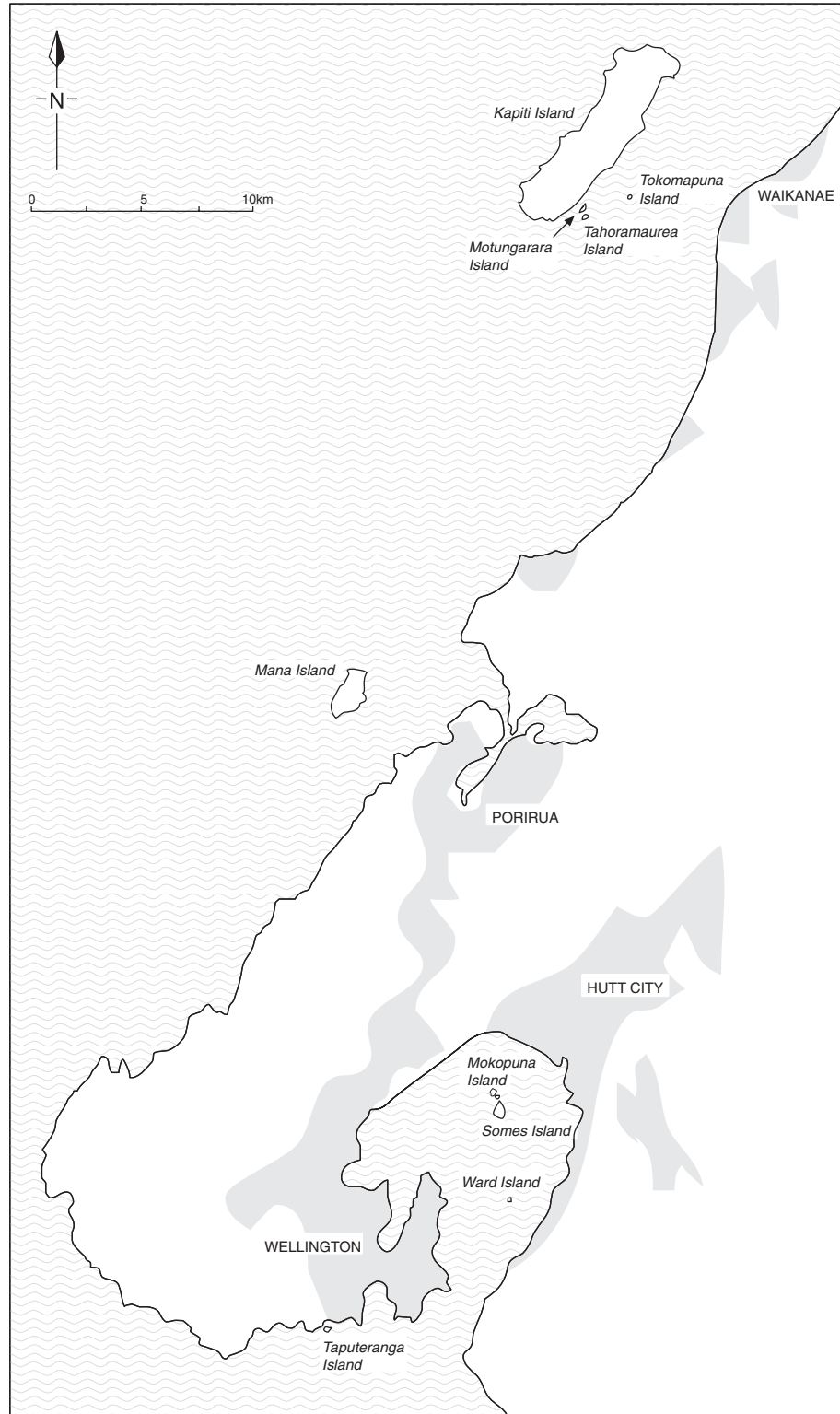
Threats

- Protection of flora and fauna of the islands from the re-establishment of rodent and other animal pest species which have been eradicated and from pest species which still exist on some islands.
- An uncontrolled fire on any of the islands could be devastating for the threatened species present and a major setback for restoration work.
- Invasive plant pests, especially where indigenous vegetation is being restored to islands once farmed.

Key Conservation Issues for the Department

- The protection of islands from predator introduction requires continual vigilance and the co-operation of private and public landowners on islands, commercial and private boat owners and public who visit the islands. Implementation of mammal contingency plans on islands other than those managed by the Department is also important.

Map 34:
Islands



- Fire control requires constant readiness to respond. The islands have few resident staff and can be difficult to reach in rough weather. Both Mana and Somes have extensive areas of combustible exotic grasses.
- Islands provide significant public awareness opportunities, as the public want to be able to visit islands to see the wildlife, to experience being on an island and to become involved in the restoration work. However, people also pose risks to the islands' conservation values and require facilities, e.g., shelter, tracks, toilets and interpretation to enjoy their visits. The Department seeks to provide for public access, but the

primary focus of management is the protection of natural and historic resources.

- An important issue is how best to progress with the restoration of the islands, taking into account the needs of indigenous threatened species and the large areas requiring restoration.
- The historic and cultural resources on the islands have not been actively managed in the past. Historic resources can be damaged and lost as sites become revegetated and roots disrupt the sub-surface. These resources will have to be identified and protected and interpreted as the restoration of islands continues.
- The Department has administrative responsibility for Somes Island under the Reserves Act, and will manage the island facility from July 1995. The transition from a closed-access quarantine station under MAF to an area managed by the Department will be the subject of consultation, and the Department will undertake further consultation over the management of the island. There are numerous opportunities to feature the island's natural and historic resources, and involve the public in their management, while seeking to restore and protect them. Involvement of the tangata whenua will be a key issue.
- Islands not managed by the Department also have conservation values, and the Department will be advocating that these be recognised and taken into account.

9.2 KAPITI ISLAND

Conservation Unit No.:	R26001
Status:	Nature Reserve
Area:	1760.75 ha
Ecological District:	Cook Strait
Local Government:	KCDC/WRC

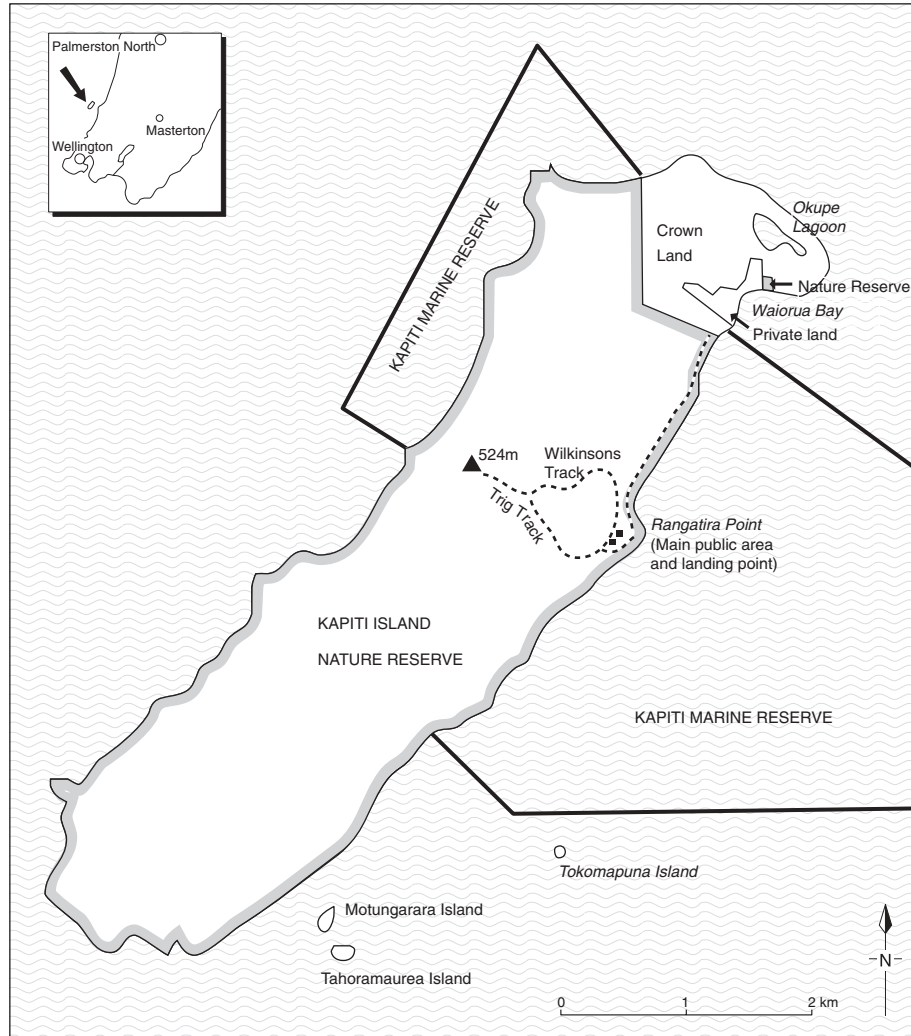
Description

Kapiti Island dominates the west coast of the lower North Island. The argillite and greywacke sandstone has formed a hilly terrain; the western cliffs rise steeply to a high ridge, and the land drops in a series of steep gullies to the east. The coastline is rocky, and flat areas are found at Rangatira Point, Waiorua Bay, Wharekohu and Kurukohatua.

The original vegetation was cleared for pastoral farming in the last century, and now Kapiti is predominantly covered in regenerating native forest. Tawa and rata/kamahahi forests are the most common vegetation in the central part of the island; elsewhere, kohekohe forest, kanuka forest and manuka scrub predominate. Indigenous plants not native to the island have also been planted, but only karo and pohutukawa have become widespread. Other habitat types are coastal shrublands, grasslands on the flats, Okupe Lagoon and small wetlands.

A 14.9 ha block at Waiorua Bay is in multiple Maori ownership. The remaining 190 ha at the northern end of the island was exchanged by its Maori owners with the Crown for half of Motungarara Island and cash. The exchange process has been ratified by the Maori Land Court. The land has become Crown land administered by the Department of Survey and Land Information (DOSLI).

Map 35:
Kapiti Island



The Department will seek agreement with DOSLI to control access to prevent unauthorised landings, while the future management of the land is determined by the Crown. The Department will seek protection for this land for the sake of its high conservation value, and to ensure that the conservation value of the adjoining nature reserve is safeguarded.

The remainder of the island is classified Nature Reserve under the Reserves Act 1977.

Kapiti Island’s full name is “Ko Te Waewae Kapiti o Tara Raua Ko Rangitane”. Whaling stations were established on Kapiti in the early part of the 19th century. The Treaty of Waitangi was signed by Te Rauparaha on the island in 1840. In 1897 the Kapiti Island Public Reserve Act reserved part of the island for the preservation of indigenous species and to require any land sales to be only to the Crown, making the island one of the country’s oldest nature reserves. The island is associated with the establishment of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society.

Within the reserve there is a ranger’s house, boat shed and accommodation for visiting staff in “The Whare” and three small research huts. Public facilities are toilets and a shelter, two tracks to the top of the island and a coastal walk to the north.

Values

- Threatened flora and fauna including: takahe, stitchbird, little spotted kiwi, brown kiwi, saddleback, North Island kokako, and long-tailed bat.

- Indigenous forest, wetland, and other habitats.
- Absence of introduced browsing animals and most predators.
- Cultural and historic associations for tangata whenua and pakeha; specific historic sites include Te Kahuoterangi, the Whare, waahi tapu and trypots at Rangatira Point.
- Opportunities for public to visit an island to observe threatened indigenous species and a browser-free forest, and for the Department to increase understanding and appreciation of islands' natural and historic resources. The island is important to conservation in New Zealand.
- Integrated protection of land and sea around part of the island, where the nature reserve adjoins Kapiti Marine Reserve.

Management Issues

Restoration

The establishment of indigenous species requires a rehabilitation strategy to maximise the island's potential as a refuge for nationally threatened species while at the same time protecting and restoring indigenous species present or formerly present on the island.

Research

Kapiti Island has a long history of conservation research, particularly in relation to threatened species ecology and the impacts and control of introduced mammals. Much of this research has been conducted by scientists from other government agencies, and universities, with varying amounts of financial or logistical support by the Department of Lands and Survey before 1987, and thereafter the Department of Conservation. The Department will continue to support research on Kapiti Island in proportion to the research programmes' perceived benefits to conservation management.

Rodents

Kapiti has both Norway rats and kiore, but not the more damaging ship rat. A mammal contingency plan is in place to prevent accidental introductions. Eradication of rats would enhance the habitat for seabirds, some forest birds, reptiles, frogs, invertebrates which cannot coexist with rodents, and enhance plant life. The feasibility of this is being evaluated. Kiore are considered a taonga to some iwi within the Conservancy, and the Department and tangata whenua are discussing the future of kiore on the island.

Visitors

Kapiti Island Nature Reserve is a special place. Public demand to visit exceeds the maximum visitor level of 50 per day, five days per week.

There is no evidence to suggest current visitor numbers impact in any significant way on the natural and historic resources. Visitor use is restricted to Rangatira Point, a coastal track to the north end, and two tracks to the summit. However, visitor numbers need to be carefully set and evaluated to ensure there are no adverse effects on the outstanding conservation values of the island and on the visitor experience of being on a remote island with a high natural character. When the current visitor levels were set in 1993, the following factors were taken into account and will be in any review of visitor numbers [*see also Implementation 10, p 113*]:

- **Ecological carrying capacity:** impact of visitors on natural and historic resources.

- **Facilities carrying capacity:** ability of recreational facilities to sustain visitor numbers without damage, and resources needed to upgrade visitor facilities to sustain numbers.
- **Social carrying capacity:** impact of contact with other visitors on a visitor's recreational experience of a remote island.

Visitor numbers also need to be monitored, and methods for better measuring indication of environmental change due to visitors are being implemented.

Concessions

Concessions will be offered by the Department for transport to and from the island, guiding and education about the environment.

[refer Section 26.1, p 215 and Table 14, p 216]

Concessions must be compatible with the protection of natural and historic resources and provide for safe and enjoyable use of the reserve. The Department intends, as a condition of all concessions, to require concessionaires to provide information to their clients that will reflect the primary purpose of the reserve as nature reserve and to reiterate the conditions of entry contained within the permit to visit (which will still be required).

In accordance with the Concessions Policy, the Department will publicly offer concession opportunities to those interested in transporting visitors to and guiding visitors around Kapiti Island Nature Reserve to put forward proposals. The Department will advertise its intention to offer a concession to a selected applicant or applicants and seek public comment.

Private Land at Waiorua Bay

Land in the northeast of the island, in Waiorua Bay, is in multiple Maori ownership. The Department recognises the rights of private landowners but is concerned about the possible effects on the nature reserve of activities on the private land. Of particular concern are rubbish disposal, sewage treatment, accidental fire, the need to prevent inadvertent re-introduction of rodents and other animals, domestic pets and plant pests. The Waiorua Trust represents most of the families with an interest in the land. The trust and other owners and the Department have worked together on fire control, on measures to prevent rats and rodents being introduced and have worked with Kapiti Coast District Council on developing a building policy to guide the development of the land for housing.

The Department seeks to consult and agree with all private owners on appropriate means to protect the nature reserve and how the Department and landowners can work together to achieve that protection.

Historic Management

Historic and archaeological sites require active management to preserve what remains and to interpret the sites for the public where appropriate. The emphasis on restoration and threatened species management has meant that historic site management has not been a past priority, but this will receive more emphasis *[refer Tables 7, p 158 and 8, p 159]*. The Department will consult with tangata whenua about the conservation and interpretation of historic and archaeological sites and may consult with other interested organisations or individuals.

Objectives

- 1 Conservation of the indigenous habitats, ecosystems and indigenous flora and fauna of Kapiti Island.
- 2 Use of the island as a sanctuary for nationally threatened species.
- 3 Conservation of the integrity of historic resources on Kapiti Island.
- 4 Allow visits to the island by the public, subject to conservation of natural and historic resources.
- 5 Increased public understanding and appreciation of the natural and historic resources of the island, and provision for community involvement in management where appropriate.
- 6 A co-operative working relationship with tangata whenua to conserve natural and historic resources and to interpret historic resources and to be good neighbours.
- 7 Research programmes allowed and encouraged where these benefit conservation management and understanding of Kapiti Island's ecology and history.

Implementation

- 1 Prepare a restoration strategy to provide guidance for species introductions and habitat restoration.
- 2 Allow transfer of threatened species and other indigenous species to and from the island in accordance with relevant species recovery plans and other management requirements, and undertake translocation in accordance with national guidelines [*refer Section 14.1, p 142*] and in consultation with tangata whenua.
- 3 Undertake work to conserve historic places identified for active management and to protect other historic and archaeological sites in consultation with tangata whenua. Sites actively managed are Te Kahuoterangi, the Whare and try pots. [*refer Table 7, p 158*]
- 4 Maintain and implement a mammal contingency plan and publicise it to commercial boat operators, private boat owners and the public.
- 5 Advocate mammal contingency planning on Motungarara, Tokomapuna, and Tahoramaurea Islands and advocate eradication of Norway rats on Tahoramaurea.
- 6 Investigate the feasibility of eradicating all rodents on Kapiti Island, and liaise with tangata whenua regarding the future of kiore.
- 7 Work with the private landowners to protect the natural and historic resources of the nature reserve. Options include agreements between the Department and landowners on fire control, mammal contingency planning, plant pests, advocacy for the provision of policies and rules in the Kapiti Coast District Plan recognising the conservation values of the island, and identifying appropriate activities and performance standards.
- 8 Public entry to the reserve will be by permit only, in accordance with section 57 of the Reserves Act 1977, and landing and public access is restricted to Rangatira Point and the public are required to stay on the tracks provided for visitors.
- 9 Overnight camping is not allowed.
- 10 The maximum number of visitors will be 50 per day up to seven days per week. The Department may close the reserve for management purposes at any time, including for emergencies (e.g., extreme fire risk), without public notice. The number of visitors may be exceeded only in specific exceptional circumstances, at the Regional Conservator's

discretion, when the activity is considered to offer direct benefit to the management of the island. People working on the island, not covered by the definition of “Officers” in section 94(2)(d) of the Reserves Act 1977, may be allowed by permit for the period of their relevant work, at the discretion of the Regional Conservator.

The maximum number was set by the Department having regard to the following factors:

- i) **Ecological carrying capacity:** the impacts of visitors on the ecological values of the area.

Research will be initiated to determine techniques for monitoring and evaluating ecological impacts of visitors on wildlife in the Reserve.

Monitoring will be implemented in accordance with research findings, using the most cost-effective method.

Where monitoring shows that visitation is having a detrimental effect on wildlife of the Reserve, visitation will be modified and evaluated to determine change in impacts.

Where required, visitor numbers may be lowered to within the ecological carrying capacity and to minimise impact.

- ii) **Facilities carrying capacity:** the number of visitors that a facility can accommodate without being damaged or impacted on.

Where visitor (environmental) impacts cause a deterioration in the standard of facilities, it may be necessary to limit use to: reduce impact on them; maintain public safety; halt further damage; and for repairs or maintenance.

- iii) **Social carrying capacity:** the impacts of contacts between people which impair or alter the recreation experience.

The social carrying capacity is the level of use beyond which impacts exceed acceptable levels specified by evaluation standards. The social carrying capacity will be periodically assessed by visitor surveys and monitoring to evaluate the following: the negative impacts perceived by visitors, caused by other visitors; the response to a nine-point crowding scale; the numbers of other groups encountered while on the tracks; and their experience of previous visits to Kapiti Island.

Kapiti provides an isolated island experience and visitor numbers may be reduced at the discretion of the Department.

Visitor numbers will be regularly reviewed and may be increased or decreased depending on the impact of visitors on the conservation of natural and historic resources and taking into account ecological, facility and social carrying capacities of the island.

- 11 Interpret natural and historic resources and management of the island for the public, including providing visitor information in consultation with tangata whenua; investigate community involvement opportunities in sponsorship and management (e.g., species monitoring).
- 12 Maintain the existing public track system and provide improved shelter and toilet facilities for visitors.
- 13 Investigate, and establish if feasible, a circular walking track for visitors on the lower slopes of the island.
- 14 Maintain extreme vigilance to prevent fires, and maintain the island as a no-smoking area.

- 15 Keep buildings to a minimum. Rangatira Point will be the main location for staff accommodation, visitor shelters and storage buildings. Huts for short stays for monitoring and research work may be located elsewhere on the island and will be located and designed to be in harmony with their surroundings. New staff accommodation facilities may be constructed.
- 16 Maintain a basic track and hut network for staff and researchers.
- 17 Assess applications to conduct research on Kapiti Island and provide logistic support for programmes with potential benefits for conservation management. Research programmes not identified to have conservation benefits will be discouraged. All research programmes conducted on the island will be managed to minimise impacts on the island's natural and historic resources and recreational opportunities.
- 18 Consult with tangata whenua on management of the protected areas on the island, to identify and take account of their interests.

9.3 MANA ISLAND

Conservation Unit No.:	R26003
Status:	Scientific Reserve
Area:	204.7 ha
Ecological District:	Cook Strait
Local Government:	PCC/WRC

Description

Mana Island is 4 km from Titahi Bay; at its closest point it is about 2.5 km from the mainland. Seen from the mainland it is formed of steep sea cliffs topped by an apparent tableland. The flat tableland is an example of one of the oldest preserved marine terraces in the Wellington Region; it was formed 200,000 years ago at a time of high sea level during an interglacial period. The island has been uplifted and slightly tilted. Much of the original vegetation was destroyed during pre-European times; the present vegetation is predominantly grassland with areas of shrubland and one small remnant of secondary forest. Revegetation is proceeding in the eastern gullies.

Mana Island provides a home for Cook Strait giant weta, McGregor's skink and goldstriped gecko. The island's Maori name is "Te Mana o Kupe ki Aotearoa". Mana was the first area in New Zealand where sheep and cattle were farmed, and the country's first wool shipment was sent from the island in June 1836.

Mana was privately farmed until 1865, when the Crown brought the land and leased it as a farm. In 1973 the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries established an exotic sheep quarantine and breeding research station. In 1978, after a suspected scrapie outbreak, the island was returned to the Department of Lands and Survey which temporarily farmed cattle; it was then decided to develop and manage Mana Island as an area representative in its natural character of the Sounds-Wellington Ecological Region and as an area for protecting certain endangered fauna, while allowing compatible public educational and recreational use.

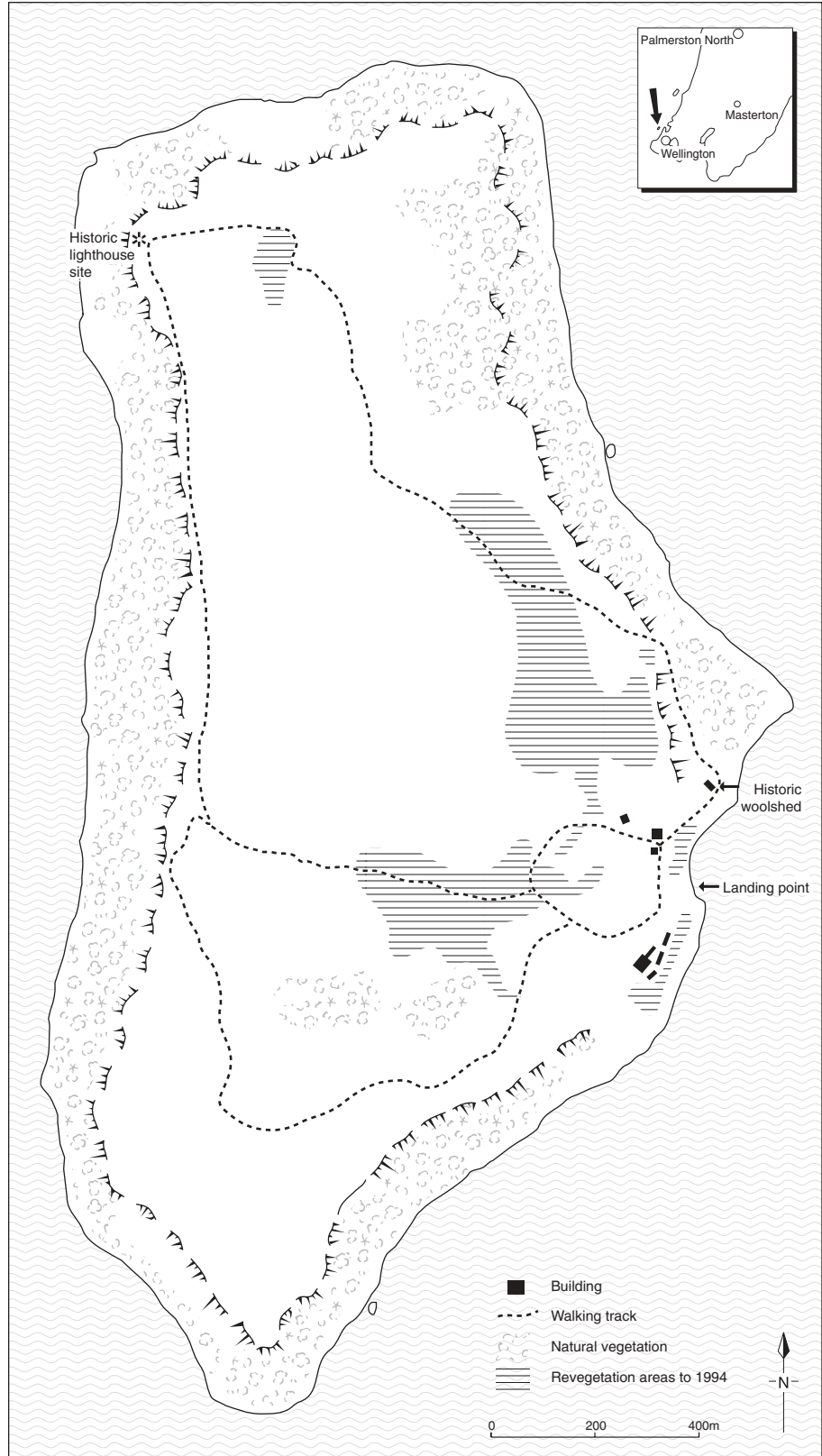
Grazing cattle ceased in 1986. To date the rehabilitation programme has planted 100,000 trees and eradicated mice; takahe and little spotted kiwi have been introduced and are breeding. There are three houses, a woolshed,

an implement and storage shed, a boat house, and a shade house. Public facilities and shelter for visitors is provided in the historic woolshed, with limited interpretation of the history of the island.

Values

- Threatened flora and fauna, including McGregor’s skink, goldstriped gecko, Cook Strait giant weta, takahe, little spotted kiwi, and Cook’s scurvy grass.

Map 36:
Mana Island



- Absence of any introduced predators or browsing animals.
- Cultural and historic associations for tangata whenua and pakeha; specific archaeological and historic sites including lighthouse, woodsheds, archaeological sites along eastern beach, and Bell's garden.
- Opportunities for public to visit the island and to be involved in rehabilitation programme, increasing their understanding and appreciation of the natural and historic resources and of importance of the island to conservation.

Management Issues

Visitors

Visitors are welcome and are an important component of the rehabilitation programme. The island is important for endangered species, so access needs to be regulated to protect those species, and staff time to supervise visitors is limited. Bylaws under section 106 of the Reserves Act 1977 to structure public visiting times will be sought. The Department will inform visitors about the need for entry restrictions.

Rehabilitation

The programme is restoring Mana Island as representative coastal vegetation of the Sounds-Wellington Ecological Region. The rehabilitation also needs to take account of the needs of threatened species. The efforts of volunteers, especially from the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society and Rotary, are essential to the programme. Nearby mainland sites of native vegetation are important seed sources and models for the rehabilitation programmes and should be preserved.

Animal Pests

Contingency plans are in place to prevent the accidental introduction of rodents or other mammal predators. The co-operation of all visitors to the island is needed.

Plant Pests

Boxthorn has spread since stock were removed. Left uncontrolled this thorny weed could seriously inhibit the establishment of native species. It is difficult to eradicate and continued effort and new management techniques are needed. The exotic grass species pose an extreme fire danger in summer. Other introduced plants of concern are karo and Tasmanian ngaio.

Threatened Species

Threatened invertebrate and lizard species have survived on the island, and new introductions will have to be assessed for their impacts on existing species. The presence of large numbers of black-backed gulls inhibits the establishment of other seabird colonies, and the gull population needs to be controlled.

Historic and Archaeological Sites

Archaeological sites, including the lighthouse site on top of the island, need to be protected during revegetation. The woolshed needs a conservation plan and maintenance to maintain its historic values.

Objectives

- 1 Restoration of indigenous ecosystems representative of the Sounds-Wellington Ecological District.

- 2 Provision for use of the island as a sanctuary for national priority threatened species, at the same time protecting threatened indigenous species which survived before the island was protected under the Reserves Act.
- 3 Conservation of the integrity of historic places.
- 4 Visits by the public permitted, subject to protection of natural and historic resources.
- 5 Community involvement in the rehabilitation of Mana Island encouraged and facilitated; increased public understanding and appreciation of the natural and historic resources and management of the island.
- 6 A co-operative working relationship with tangata whenua to conserve natural and historic resources and to interpret historic resources.

Implementation

- 1 Prepare a restoration plan to provide guidance for habitat rehabilitation and species introductions.
- 2 Provide for and encourage volunteers to assist in revegetation and other rehabilitation and monitoring programmes.
- 3 Advocate for the recognition and protection of nearby mainland sites which still have indigenous vegetation. They are important seed sources for revegetation and as models of plant communities suitable for Mana.
- 4 Allow transfers of threatened species and other indigenous species to and from the island in accordance with relevant recovery plans and other management requirements. Undertake any translocations in accordance with national guidelines and in consultation with tangata whenua.
- 5 Undertake work to conserve historic places identified for active management and protect other historic and archaeological sites. Actively managed sites are the Mana Island lighthouse site, the woolshed, and beach sites on the eastern beach [*refer Table 7, p 158*].
- 6 Maintain and implement a mammal contingency plan and publicise its prevention clauses to commercial boat operators, private boat owners and the public.
- 7 Control boxthorn and other weed species and any animal pests which have the potential to significantly inhibit or alter the process of rehabilitation.
- 8 Provide interpretation of natural and historic resources and island management and visitor information to increase public understanding and appreciation of the island.
- 9 Provide defined public access routes around the island.
- 10 Seek to establish bylaws under section 106 of the Reserves Act 1977 to regulate visitors access to the island by:
 - Closing public access to the island on Mondays and Tuesdays.
 - Restricting public landings to between 10 am and 1 pm on open days, and to the area around the boat shed.
 - Ensuring the public depart the island by 5 pm.
 - Providing for areas to be excluded from visitor entry, to protect wildlife from undue interference.
 - Providing for the island to be closed immediately without prior notice, for security or safety reasons or in case of threat to wildlife.

- 11 Keep buildings to a minimum. The main location for buildings on the island will be around the current staff accommodation, workshops, and boat shed. All buildings shall be in harmony with their surroundings.
- 12 Consult with tangata whenua on management of the island, to identify and take account of their interests.
- 13 Maintain vigilance to prevent fires and restrict smoking to the beach at the landing point.

9.4 SOMES ISLAND

Conservation Unit No.:	R27108
Status:	Unclassified Reserve, Reserves Act 1977
Area:	24.89 ha
Ecological District:	Wellington
Local Government:	HCC/WRC

Management Structure Somes Island is an unclassified reserve subject to the Reserves Act 1977. Under section 62 of the Reserves Act the administering authority is the Regional Conservator of the Wellington Conservancy of the Department of Conservation. In the past, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) has managed the island as a quarantine facility.

Description Somes Island is in Wellington Harbour and is the largest of the three harbour islands. The island's Maori name is "Matiu". It is surrounded by a narrow shore platform, on which are scattered stacks and shingle beaches. There are steep cliffs up to 20 m high in places near the shore, but the greater part of the island is flat to moderately steep, with three prominent step-like levels. About two-thirds of the island is pasture, of which half is grazed for fire control purposes. Around the quarantine facility are old macrocarpa and radiata pine. On eastern cliff faces and gullies are areas of native shrubland, and areas on the southern, western and some inland slopes have been replanted with indigenous species.

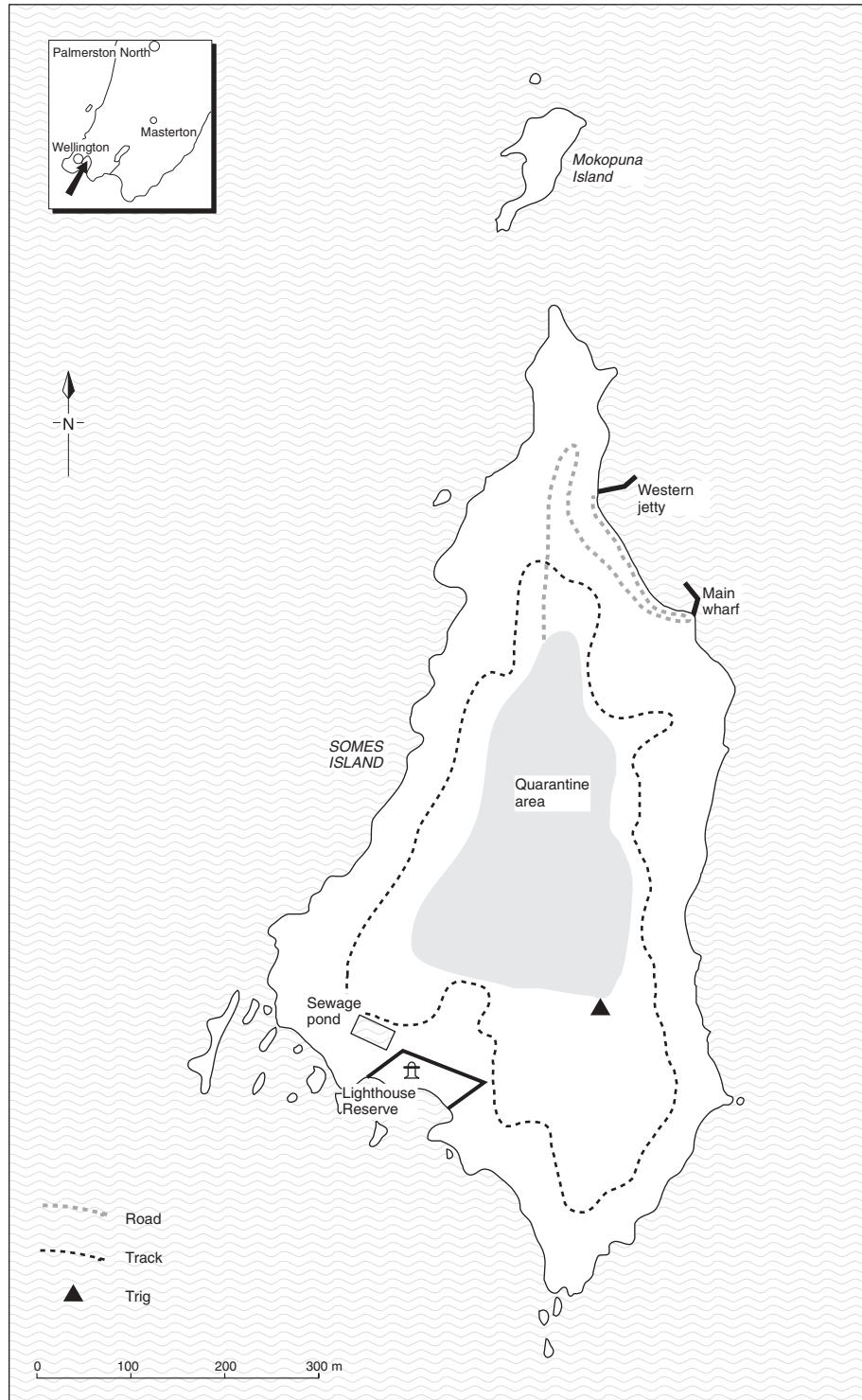
The former MAF quarantine facility buildings, paddocks and staff houses are located in the centre of the island, and two wharves in the northern bay provide access to the island. The quarantine facility operated from 1908 to 30 June 1995. Until 1919 the island was used intermittently as a quarantine station for immigrants to New Zealand.

The Wellington Regional Council operates part of the harbour's navigation lights from the island and also two hydrological recording stations. While public access was available only with the approval of MAF, the Council ran Summer Treks Programme trips to the island for 1200 visitors.

The Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society (Lower Hutt Branch) have been carrying out a rehabilitation programme on the island since 1981, with substantial MAF staff support. Annual plantings of indigenous species have been undertaken, and ship rats were eradicated in 1989 at the initiation of island staff in association with Forest and Bird and the Department.

Mokopuna Island (0.79 ha), a wildlife management reserve adjacent to Somes, is also rodent-free and is a breeding site for seabirds.

Map 37:
Somes Island



Values

- Threatened plants and wildlife; only breeding site of the spotted shag in the region. The island is a safe breeding site for seabirds in the harbour, and, since the eradication of rats, has a rich reptile fauna.
- Rodent- and browser-free island, with potential to provide habitat for rare plants, reptiles and invertebrates.
- Public awareness opportunities to involve the public in plant restoration programmes and for the public to learn about the values of islands for the conservation of New Zealand species.
- Waahi tapu and pa sites, early European sites, military fortifications from both World Wars, and some of the quarantine facility buildings

which have intrinsic historic and cultural value. These also have value for interpretation to the visiting public where appropriate.

Management Issues

Quarantine Facility

Government agreed (in April 1995) to the closure of the quarantine facility on the island. The land and facilities have been managed by the Department since 1 July 1995.

Classification

While a reserve under the Reserves Act 1977, the island has never been formally classified. The Department favours a scientific reserve classification. This classification would provide flexibility for the rehabilitation of the island, for research on its rehabilitation and on species on the island or on other topics, and would provide for visitors.

Rehabilitation

The island is within the Wellington District of the Sounds-Wellington Ecological Region, and its rehabilitation programme will be based on establishing species and plant communities of the Ecological Region. The island has huge potential as a site for rare indigenous plants, reptiles and invertebrates, but its size limits the number of species, especially forest birds, which could be established without intensive management.

Some seedlings (e.g., pohutukawa) established to date are from outside the Ecological Region and their future will need to be assessed in future planning of the rehabilitation of the island.

The Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society and MAF have made excellent progress in restoring indigenous habitats and species to the island. The Department will continue to work in partnership with the community on this task. To maximise the island's potential for establishment of indigenous habitats and species, a plan will be drawn up to guide the revegetation and the introduction of indigenous species. The rehabilitation plan will also make provision for the potential of the island as a habitat for reptiles, invertebrates and threatened plants.

Several exotic weed species (e.g., boxthorn) need regular control. Some exotics have been planted – macrocarpa, pine, eucalypt, pampas and Tasmanian ngaio. Those that do not contribute to enhancing species habitat, or provide shade and shelter for visitors or buildings, will be removed.

Somes is home to a large black-backed gull population. The size and status of this population needs to be assessed in accordance with the rehabilitation plan and Wellington Airport concerns, and black-backed gulls will be controlled if appropriate.

Public Access and Future Management

In the past, the quarantine function of the island restricted public access. Access was by arrangement with MAF only and unauthorised landings were prohibited. This had advantages for rodent control and in reducing fire risk.

The Department will expand public access to allow more people to be involved in the rehabilitation programme and to visit the island for passive recreation, while recognising the need for some restrictions to reduce the risk of fire and reintroduction of predators. The location of the island in the centre of New Zealand's second largest urban area offers opportunities for people to be involved in conservation work and to learn about the

conservation of New Zealand's indigenous biodiversity. The island also has the potential to offer a high quality recreational opportunity to visit an island. The Department, as the administering body of the reserve will work with tangata whenua, the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, and interested community groups on the rehabilitation programme, mammal contingency planning, the monitoring and management of the indigenous species, and historic resource management.

Lighthouse

The Wellington Regional Council runs a lighthouse on Somes as part of the Wellington Harbour Navigation Lights System. The lighthouse is situated on a 3.456 ha "Lighthouse Site" gazetted under the ROLD Act 1923. The Department will need to clarify an arrangement with the Council to cover such issues as power supply and public access.

Objectives

- 1 Protection of indigenous species present, as a high priority.
- 2 Rehabilitation of indigenous ecosystems representative of the Wellington District of the Sounds-Wellington Ecological Region.
- 3 Protection of the historic integrity of waahi tapu, historic and archaeological sites.
- 4 Encouragement of the continuing involvement of the community in the restoration of the island.
- 5 Provision of a high quality visitor destination with free public access, provided this will not have an adverse effect on the island's natural and historic resources.
- 6 Investigation of the potential and, if appropriate, use of the island for threatened species management programmes.

Implementation

- 1 Manage the island to protect natural and historic resources from the threats of plant and animal pests and fire.
- 2 Actively reduce the risk of fire including:
 - Restricting smoking to designated areas;
 - Closing the island to the public in the event of high fire risk;
 - Immediately suppressing any fires.
- 3 Prepare a rehabilitation plan for the island, in consultation with tangata whenua and the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society and other interest groups.
- 4 Implement the rehabilitation plan in conjunction with the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society and other community groups; using species from the Sounds-Wellington Ecological Region.
- 5 Seek to classify the island as a scientific reserve under the Reserves Act 1977.
- 6 Seek the re-establishment of the island's Maori name, Matiu (or Matiu-Somes in the interim).
- 7 Progressively remove exotic plants unless individual plants provide shelter or have historic or ecological values.
- 8 Assess the historic value of MAF structures and advocate the maintenance of those of historic significance. [*Refer Section 15, Implementation 8, p 157*]

- 9 Work with the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society and other community groups to continue community involvement in the restoration and other work programmes.
- 10 Prepare and implement a mammal contingency plan for Somes and Mokopuna Islands.
- 11 The Department will staff the island and seek the assistance of voluntary wardens.
- 12 The Department may:
 - Continue to graze limited numbers of sheep for pasture control to reduce fire risk;
 - Continue to maintain an oxidation pond for human effluent;
 - Remove domestic and farm rubbish from the island;
 - Encourage the establishment of education programmes on the island.
- 13 Upgrade the walking track and signage to increase the quality of visitors' experiences.
- 14 Confirm an arrangement with Wellington Regional Council regarding the lighthouse site.

