

protecting natural areas design guide



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protecting natural areas – a design guide

introduction

identifying natural values
& significance

design
factors &
recommendations

	Page
1. natural areas cue to original landscape character	7
2. remnants of original functioning eco-systems	8
3. extend across ecological sequences	9
4. underlying land systems analysis	10
5. catchment-based design	11
6. natural boundaries the most effective	13
7. respect natural change	14
8. seek self-sustaining areas	15
9. link isolated areas to enhance value	15
10. maximise the core and minimise the edge	16
11. consider buffers at the same time as boundaries	17
12. access requirements for management and maintenance	20
13. site fence-lines according to landform	21
14. consider carefully plant pests....	23
15. ... and the risks of animal pests	23
16. natural regeneration or vegetation restoration?	24
17. be aware of cultural needs	25
18. public access to protected natural areas can have advantages	25
summary and checklist	26

introduction

Most of our “lived in landscapes” comprise a mix of productive and remnant natural areas but it is the **natural areas** that characterise our unique New Zealand landscape identity and ecological diversity.

Each natural area is important in contributing to this landscape identity and ecological diversity even though the extent and quality of natural areas varies enormously throughout the country. While many are viable for the longer term, others are not. Frequently, all it takes to ensure their continuing existence and viability in the longer term is a better understanding of the area's functional requirements in the larger system and, sometimes, some adaptation of management practices.

This guide aims to assist the effective establishment and long term viability in protecting natural areas. It recognizes that many natural areas are fundamental to maintaining (larger) functioning natural ecosystems, whether or not they are formally protected. The aim is to provide guidance to assist in achieving self-sustaining natural areas:

- **regardless of their status** (e.g informal protection, covenant, reserve), and,
- **regardless of who has management responsibility** (e.g. a private land-owner, a conservation trust, a council, or the Department of Conservation).

The guide identifies a number of issues. It looks at the need to understand the significance of each area's wider context and looks at particular design issues to be considered in protecting an area.





A key issue is identifying where a protected area's boundaries should be extended to. The issues are noted alongside illustrated examples and include recommendations for long term sustainable management.

In promoting recommendations, it is recognized that other management considerations, such as those relating to other uses, ownership, costs etc, will affect decisions relating to the design and management of a natural area and that not all the recommendations may be achievable in every situation. However, in using this guide, it is advised that each issue and recommendation be carefully considered - and that longer term goals are well identified. This is necessary to ensure the benefits and rewards are maximized for the time and effort invested.

A summary checklist is provided as a ready reference at the end of the guide, with page references back to the issues and recommendations discussed.

identifying natural values & their significance

Natural areas are frequently identified for their iconic features (e.g. a particular landform or water body, a wetland, stand of podocarp forest, feeding or nesting of a particular bird species, etc). These features may be important as uncommon or isolated remnant or they may be important in characterising a district or region. However, while they may be immediately obvious as features, their value for future generations will depend on how sustainable they are and how well the natural systems supporting them will endure.

Each natural area (including any proposed additions) will have its own unique set of values, and some areas may be more highly regarded than others for determining their nature heritage value.

The following four criteria are recognized in determining nature heritage value¹:

- **Representativeness**
– how representative and/or rare the area is in terms of its natural values (original indigenous vegetation, habitat, ecological processes etc)
- **Sustainability**
– how sustainable the area will be over time
- **Landscape integrity**
– the extent to which the area contributes to and maintains the original integrity of the landscape
- **Amenity/utility**
– the extent to which the area contributes to the enjoyment and welfare of the (local) people.

Representativeness is referenced to New Zealand's Ecological Regions and Districts². The following issues and recommendations relate largely to the remaining three criteria.



¹ More detail on these criteria is available in the Nature Heritage Fund's Assessment Criteria - see reference list page 27

² McEwen, Mary 1987