

Kaimanawa Wild Horses Working Plan

2012 – 2017

Introduction

The Minister of Conservation issued the Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan in May 1996. The plan is based on keeping some areas free of horses and managing their numbers in remaining areas. It recommends a strategy that includes a review of location options for the horses after three years of monitoring the outcomes for two alternative options (management in situ and management elsewhere).

In accordance with the plan, the herd was reduced significantly in 1997 with a remnant herd of around 500 horses retained in the southern section of the Waiouru Military Training Area. Since 1997, routine musters have been undertaken to contain the herd within the chosen boundaries and remove the equivalent of the annual population increase. This management has become the, generally accepted, 'status quo'.

However, as only one location option (management in situ) was able to be implemented, the review and subsequent choice of location for future management, envisaged by the plan, has not been able to be undertaken. Similarly, sufficient monitoring data is not yet available to judge the sustainability of the herd retained in the Waiouru Military Training Area.

The Kaimanawa Wild Horse Advisory Group recommended that a revised plan be prepared to clarify the goals and objectives of the existing management 'status quo'. A working plan was therefore prepared to reconfirm the goals and objectives of the Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan and to guide their implementation for the next five years from 2004-2009. A further decision was taken in 2009 to reduce the managed herd to around 300 horses. This current version of the working plan, 2012-2017, reflects that decision and other changes agreed in October 2011.

Kaimanawa Wild Horses Working Plan 2012 – 2017

Goals and Objectives

This working plan reconfirms the goals and objectives of the Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan, 1995. (Reference pages 53 – 54, Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan, 1995).

1. Goals

This plan seeks:

1. To ensure that the welfare of the horses is dealt with appropriately.
2. To promote the sustainability of the natural features and ecosystems of the Moawhango Ecological District, with respect to Kaimanawa wild horse impacts on these.
3. To manage the Kaimanawa wild horse herd at a sustainable level.

2. Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan Management Objectives

The following objectives provide the purposes of management of Kaimanawa wild horses. They are statements of what management intends to achieve. The ecological objectives are listed here first as it is these that bring urgency to the plan. Otherwise, the objectives are not ranked in an order of importance.

2.1 Ecological objectives

1. Ensure that nationally endangered and rare plants and a number of biogeographically significant plants are not adversely affected by Kaimanawa wild horses
2. Prevent further degradation of the ecosystems of tussock grasslands, subalpine herbfields, wetlands and forest margins, by the Kaimanawa herd.
3. Prevent the Kaimanawa wild horses from spreading into the neighbouring Tongariro National Park and the Kaimanawa Forest Park.

2.2 Kaimanawa wild horse objectives

1. Retain a herd of (at least) a minimum effective population of Kaimanawa wild horses, in a generally free ranging existence. (*Note that the minimum effective population is considered to be 300*)
2. Ensure that the Kaimanawa wild horse population is managed at a level which allows a safety margin in the biological tolerance of the area.
3. Ensure that the treatment of Kaimanawa wild horses during any management or manipulation justified by this plan is humane. (*Note that the original objective has been refined to remove ambiguity and potential conflict with individual responsibility once horses have passed into private ownership. Refer: Animal Welfare Act 1999.*)
4. Reduce conflict between Kaimanawa wild horses and other land uses and ecological values.
5. Improve public access to view the Kaimanawa wild horses.
6. Ensure public safety from roaming horses.

A guiding principle in all control options is that the vital interest of individual horses is respected, including the avoidance of unnecessary pain and/or stress. Effective control programmes which utilise the most humane methods available should be pursued, refer Appendix 5. Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan, 1995. (*Objective 2.2.3 above refers.*)

3. Kaimanawa Wild Horse Advisory Group

The Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan, 1995 recommends that a Kaimanawa Wild Horse Trust be established to provide advice to the Department and to be able to take over management of any herd retained under the plan but not located on army land. As there is no herd except on Army land a trust was not established. In its place the Minister of Conservation agreed that an advisory group should be established. Terms of reference for the Kaimanawa Wild Horse Advisory Group (KWHAG) are reproduced in Appendix 1.

The current KWHAG membership consists of representatives appointed by:

Department of Conservation (DOC)

Kaimanawa Heritage Horses (KHH)

Kaimanawa Wild Horse Preservation Society (KWHPS)

Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RNZSPCA)

Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society (F&B)

NZ Veterinary Association (NZVA)

Tongariro Whanganui Taranaki Conservation Board

Batley Family

Oruamatua Kaimanawa Trust

NZ Army

The KWHAG has reviewed the Kaimanawa Wild Horse Plan 1995 and developed this working plan to guide management for the next five years.

4. Kaimanawa Wild Horse Management Area

Kaimanawa horses managed under this plan will be confined to that area of the Waiouru Military Training Area (WMTA) located to the east of State Highway 1 and to the south of the Awapatu catchment. This area is described in the Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan 1995 (page 26) as the Argo sector. Kaimanawa horses located outside of the Argo sector within the WMTA will be removed as opportunities permit.

5. Kaimanawa Wild Horse Population Levels Within the Management Area

Between 1997 and 2009, the herd was been managed with the objective of limiting the herd in the Argo sector to about 500. Veterinary observers have noted a steady increase in the condition of the horses, particularly mares, under this management regime. The Kaimanawa Wild Horse Advisory Group is therefore confident that the needs of the herd are being met. To reduce management costs and the number of surplus animals needing to be destroyed the KWHAG agreed in 2009 to implement a reduction in the herd size to 300.

Further monitoring is required to determine if a sustainable relationship between the horse herd and its environment has been/can be achieved and it is not yet known if the

presence of the herd at around 300 will lead to the improvement or deterioration of the tussocklands.

It is proposed that the herd continue to be managed at 300 within the management area but that this population level be reappraised as “sustainability” monitoring trends become clear and the level adjusted if required. (Refer Section 8).

6. Strategies for Controlling the Population Growth Rate

A significant amount of research has been completed since 1995. However, no more effective control strategies than removal have yet been identified. Research (particularly in the USA) may result in contraceptive technologies that are applicable to the management of the Kaimanawa herd in situ.

Similarly, improved methods or technology may permit the currently available strategies to be modified and refined. It is therefore proposed that the Kaimanawa Wild Horse Advisory Group regularly appraise and assess the applicability of alternative methods for controlling population growth.

7. Determining a Sustainable Level of Horses to Retain in the Argo Sector

The key criteria against which the impact of the horses will be assessed are the ecological and wild horse objectives established by the Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan, 1995 and duplicated in section 2 of this plan. For the purposes of defining the ecological and land-use benchmarks against which horse impacts will be appraised, the NZ Army’s “Sustainable Land Management Strategy for the Waiouru Military Training Area” (SLMS) is the primary plan for the area. In particular, SLMS objectives with respect to the naturalness and ecology of the area will provide guidance for assessing the outcome of Kaimanawa wild horse objectives 2.1.2, 2.2.2 and 2.2.4. The thinking which guided the preparation of the SLMS is summarised in section 1.5 of that strategy. Relevant sections are reproduced in Appendix 2 of this plan.

NZ Army is establishing a monitoring programme to assess the effectiveness of its SLMS. This monitoring programme will provide more data against which the impact of horses (and other large animals) can be assessed. This monitoring programme plus monitoring undertaken by DOC since 1997 will provide a means by which the sustainability of the herd can be appraised in relation to its environments.

The Kaimanawa Wild Horse Advisory Group also considers that available feed resources for horses and the ability of the market to absorb removed horses should be considered when herd size sustainability issues are being assessed in future. (Refer 2.2.3.)

8. Desired Management Outcomes

The KWHAG reviewed the desired outcomes described in the Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan, 1995 (Page 70) and reaffirmed that those outcomes remain valid with the exception of the outcome relating to the proposed Kaimanawa Wild Horse Trust. Consequently, the Kaimanawa Wild Horse Trust outcome has been amended to reflect the existence and role of the Kaimanawa Wild Horse Advisory Group.

Desired outcomes

1. A sustainable Kaimanawa wild horse population/environment relationship exists.

2. A minimum effective population (i.e 300 plus) of Kaimanawa wild horses is retained as a wild herd.
3. A humane, effective and flexible population growth control programme is able to maintain both a healthy wild herd and a healthy habitat, wherever the herd is located.
4. Opportunities for the public to appreciate the herd have been enhanced.
5. Kaimanawa Wild Horse Advisory Group provides advice to the Minister of Conservation and the Department on the implementation of the management plan.
6. The 'at risk' conservation values in the Moawhango Ecological District are no longer threatened by the impacts of the Kaimanawa wild horses.
7. The Department of Conservation continues to monitor the conservation values in the district and advocates for the preservation of outstanding conservation values.
8. The army and other land managers continue to control other plant and animal threats to the natural ecosystem.

Based on these desired outcomes a revised set of recommendations for management action is proposed covering the period 2004 - 2009.

9. Management Recommendations

The Kaimanawa Wild Horse Advisory Group has agreed that the following recommendations should provide the basis for management of the Kaimanawa Wild Horse herd on the Waiouru Military Training Area, by the Department of Conservation, for the period 2012 – 2017.

1. *Facilitate the Kaimanawa Wild Horse Advisory Group whose core membership will consist of representatives of Army, Oruamatua-Kaimanawa 1U & 1V landowners, Batley family, DOC, KWHPs, KHH, RNZSPCA, NZVA, RF&BPS, Tongariro Wanganui Taranaki Conservation Board. The advisory group should meet at least twice per annum.*
2. *Annual horse population censuses should be conducted. An independent observer nominated by the advisory group will be used every third year.*
3. *Retain approximately 300 horses in the Argo Sector. Reappraise this number periodically as sustainability monitoring data becomes available and adjust if required. Ensure that public consultation is required if the Department requests to reduce the minimum number of horses below 300.*
4. *Manage the Awapatu catchment and all areas north of that catchment at zero horse density. (Zero density areas are those areas where the goal is to clear horses in order to protect environmental values, however it is acknowledged that some horses may, from time to time, temporarily move into these areas and that this will not necessarily require immediate intervention.)*
5. *Regularly reduce population levels to the agreed number (refer 3 above) by non-selective removals from areas where population density increases have been greatest.*

- a. Removal operations should target entire bands at random, in order to minimise selectivity and human influence on the population structure and characteristics of the herd.
6. *Regularly appraise and assess the applicability of alternative methods (including contraception) for controlling population growth.*
 - a. New or improved techniques or modifications of existing techniques may require recommendation 5 to be reviewed and adjusted.
7. *Ensure the principles that the (1995) working party developed for humaneness are adhered to during any management or manipulation justified by this plan.*
 - a. Refer to Appendix V (of the Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan, 1995) for the criteria for the assessment of humane treatment developed by the (1995) working party.
8. *Maintain and, where practicable, extend performance monitoring programmes in the current wild horse range and in those areas from which horses have been removed. Monitoring should be designed to facilitate assessment of sustainability of impacts.*
9. *Where practicable, co-ordinate performance monitoring programmes with those established by Army.*
10. *Publicly review the Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan if a sustainable relationship is unable to be achieved in the Argo sector and the choice between the retention of a horse population and the improvement of the natural character of the tussocklands is made in favour of the tussocklands.*
11. *Negotiate with the owners of adjoining private lands, which have wild horses, to ensure the management of these horses is compatible with management of horses on adjoining army land.*
12. That DOC and Defence will provide, when available, periodic reports on habitat and vegetation assessment.
13. To consider practicality of fencing and include safety considerations in regards to managing risks and threats.

Appendix 1

Kaimanawa Wild Horse Advisory Group

Terms of reference as originally adopted on 12 April 1999 and amended in October 2011:

Background

The Kaimanawa Wild Horse Advisory Group was established to fulfil the functions of the Kaimanawa Wild Horse Trust whose establishment is one of the recommendations of the Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan 1995. It has been agreed that the group will operate in an advisory capacity.

Broad function

To provide advice to the Department on the implementation of the Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan, 1995. (Refer Recommendation 1, KWHP, pg. 70).

Specific functions

1. Provide expert advice about the implementation of the Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan (1995)
2. Provide expert advice to ensure treatment of the horses is humane
3. Provide expert advice on how to preserve and control the horses in the long term in accordance with the Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan (1995) and how to manage them at a sustainable level. This could include suggestions for research projects
4. Provide expert advice on the negative impacts of the horses on the environment where horses are retained and how those impacts might be eliminated, including protecting indigenous plants and prevention of invasive weeds, preventing further damage to ecosystems and preventing the horses spreading into Tongariro National Park, Kaimanawa Forest Park and the Northern Zone
5. Provide advice to the Department of Conservation, and hence the Minister, on how to communicate with the public on horse-related issues that arise during the implementation of the plan.
6. Provide expert advice on any concerns about public safety in relation to horses.
7. Provide expert advice on other matters that relate to the plan, as required.

Operations

The Kaimanawa Wild Horse Advisory Group will meet at least twice per year with meetings timed to precede any significant management activities. Additional meetings may be required if specific advice is required on particular issues.

The group will operate on the basis of consensus.

Membership of the advisory Group will include representatives from NZVA, RNZSPCA, KWHP, KHH, RF&BPS, Tongariro Whanganui Taranaki Conservation Board, NZ Army, Oruamatua Kaimanawa Trust and the Batley family. Other members or representatives may be invited to participate in recognition of their particular knowledge, expertise or representativeness.

Members of the advisory group agree to accept the Kaimanawa Wild Horses Plan.

The Conservator (Wanganui) or his nominee will facilitate meetings of the group.

Disputes

The advisory group may choose to provide direct advice to the Minister of Conservation should it find itself in significant conflict with the Department.

Review of terms of reference

The group will review its terms of reference annually.

Appendix 2

Approach to Preparation of Sustainable Land Management Strategy for Waiouru Military Training Area (WMTA)

Sustainable management

The WMTA is a substantial piece of Crown land. The New Zealand Army recognises that as the occupier of the land, and notwithstanding the primary military use of the land, it has an obligation to manage its activities in a way which is generally consistent with the “sustainable management” purpose of the Resource Management Act 1991 and the Government’s Sustainable Land Management Strategy for New Zealand.

Sustainable management places an emphasis on safeguarding the functioning of natural ecosystems (including the protection of soil and water values), protecting outstanding natural features and landscapes and areas of significant indigenous vegetation and habitats, and generally avoiding or mitigating the adverse effects of activities on the environment.

In addition to being concerned with protection of the resource base, sustainable management is also concerned with managing the use and development of natural and physical resources [see Glossary]. “Natural and physical resources” are defined by the Act to include land, water, air, soil, minerals and energy, all forms of plants and animals (whether native to New Zealand or introduced), and all structures.

Integration of military and conservation objectives

The Army acknowledges that military activities impact on vegetation and soils within the WMTA but it does not view military objectives and conservation objectives as being incompatible or mutually exclusive. In fact, it is the WMTA’s combination of natural assets – the landforms, soils, climate and vegetation – that render it an outstanding training area. The Army therefore wishes to retain the natural values of the area. It has come to see itself as part of the ecosystem – both affecting it and being dependent upon it. Consequently, the Army places a high premium on understanding the functioning of the ecosystem(s) and the actions that it needs to take to avoid or minimise adverse effects on natural values.

Focus on vegetation management

Much of the Strategy relates to vegetation management – be it the control of grazing pressure (animal pests, wild horses, domestic animals), weed control, fire control or the control of military activities with the potential to damage vegetation (off-road use of vehicles, shelling activity). The reason for this emphasis is two-fold. First, the volcanic soils of the WMTA are fragile and the climate/altitude is generally inhospitable to plant growth. The close cropping or destruction of vegetative cover exposes the fragile soils to frost and/or wind action and hence erosion. Erosion is not only destructive of natural and aesthetic values, and generally inconsistent with precepts of sustainable management, it also leaves the land unsuitable for ongoing military training activities. Second, the

removal of natural vegetation facilitates the encroachment of invasive plant species which, in addition to impacting the natural values of the area, detracts from the value of the area for military training purposes.

Risk management perspectives

The Army considers that the key to sustainable management of the WMTA lies in the identification and prioritisation of environmental risks (potential adverse effects) associated with military activities and other anthropogenic effects (e.g. invasion by introduced plant and animal pests) and the putting in place of policies and methods aimed at minimising the risks while having regard to the particular physical and biological characteristics of different areas or operational zones within the WMTA. For example, if fire is a major source of environmental risk in terms of its potential to lead to erosion and/or to facilitate encroachment of plant pests, and certain types of vegetation are more prone to fire than others, it makes sense to avoid live firing (shelling) into areas with that type of vegetation, if it is possible to do so.

A recent assessment of the environmental effects of shelling activities on the WMTA (Kingett Mitchell & Associates 1999) develops a Geographical Information System (GIS)-based “risk model” and advocates a risk management approach to the future conduct of shelling activities. Some of the recommendations of the report have been incorporated in this Strategy (section 4.2.2).

More generally, the Army sees itself as being involved in a process of developing risk management perspectives on all of its military training and land management activities within the WMTA. Policies and methods will be gradually refined as the results of monitoring and further scientific studies become available.