

**Natural areas
of Kaipara
Ecological District
(Northland Conservancy)**

**Reconnaissance survey report for the
Protected Natural Areas Programme**

2009



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Te Papa Atawhai

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Reconnaissance Survey Report for the Protected Natural Areas Programme

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Foreword

This report forms part of a series of reconnaissance survey reports for the Protected Natural Areas Programme (PNAP) in the Northland Conservancy of the Department of Conservation. It describes the significant natural areas of the Northland Conservancy portion of Kaipara Ecological District, which were surveyed in the summer of 2006-2007. To date, there has been no comprehensive review of ecological information of this geographic area. This report provides a significant information resource for the Department of Conservation, Northland Regional Council, Kaipara District Council, iwi, landowners, planners, interest groups, and the general public to further the conservation of remaining natural areas.

The Northland Conservancy portion of Kaipara Ecological District encompasses a long narrow strip mostly of consolidated sand country, bordered for much of its length by the Kaipara Harbour and its northern extension, the Northern Wairoa River. The harbour, the largest in New Zealand and the Southern Hemisphere, is a nationally and internationally important habitat for migratory and non-migratory bird species. Terrestrial indigenous ecosystems are almost all secondary and much fragmented; notable exceptions are the two outstanding old-growth forest remnants at Pouto and the largest gumland left in lower Northland, at Maitahi. The most extensive are kanuka forest/shrubland and coastal sand dunes, especially the very extensive and extremely important Pouto dune system in the southwest corner of the district. Wetlands, both freshwater and estuarine, flaxland, and manuka shrubland are also significant.

This study provides an objective assessment of the ecological value of the remaining natural areas, both protected and unprotected, of the District. The subsequent need is then for the community to work collaboratively to protect the better of these areas.

The Kaipara (Northland Conservancy) PNAP survey report was prepared by Landcare Research and the University of Waikato under contract to the Department of Conservation.



Chris Jenkins
Conservator Northland

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Abbreviations used in this report

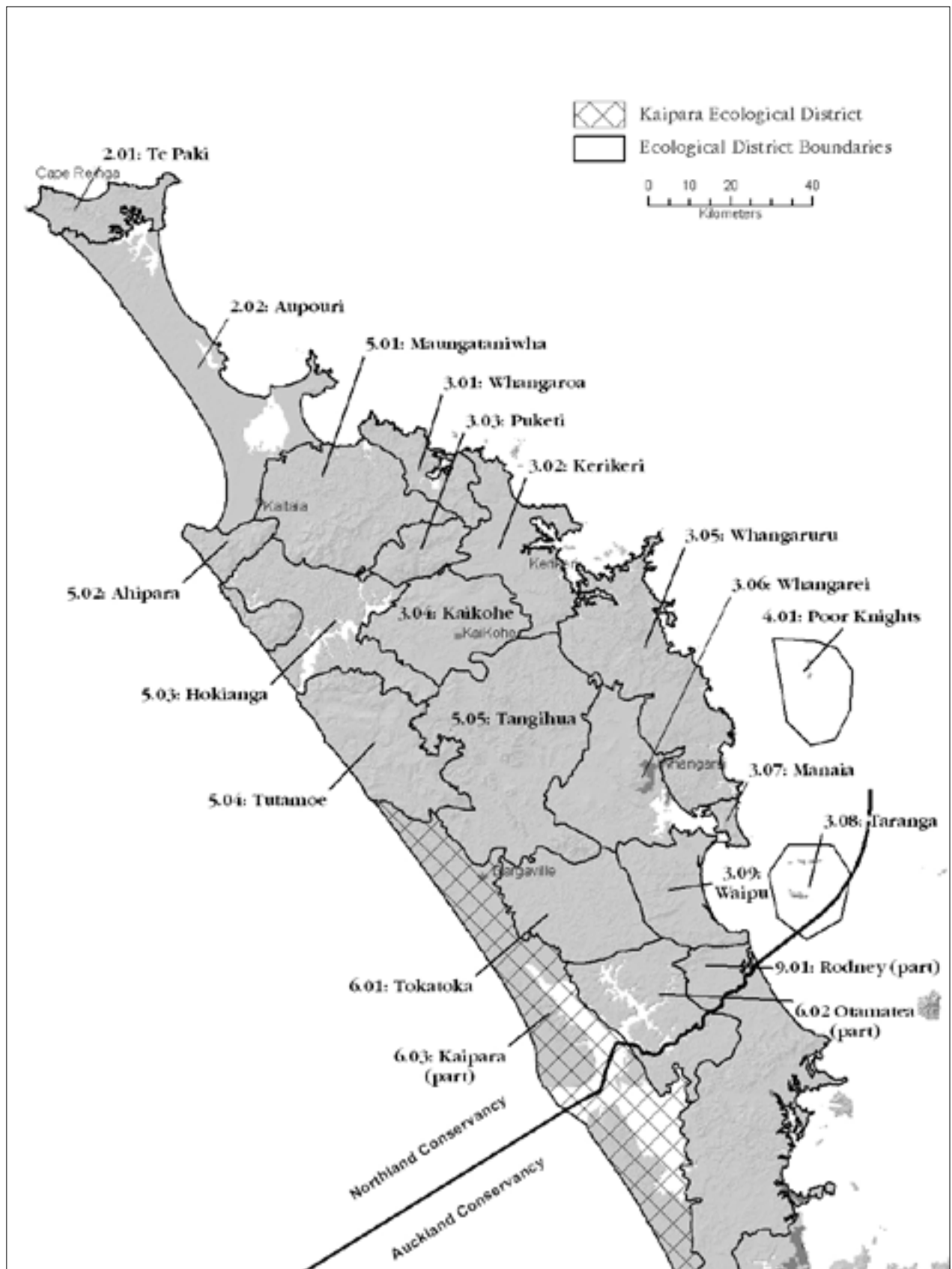
BP	before present
CA	Conservation Area
CSN	Classified Summarised Notes in Notornis, the Journal of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand
DOC	Department of Conservation
ED	Ecological District
FSU	Fauna Survey Unit
GPWMR	Government Purpose Wildlife Management Reserve
HA	Historic Area
HR	Historic Reserve
MfE	Ministry for the Environment
MS	Marginal Strip
NIWA	National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research
NRC	Northland Regional Council
NZWS	New Zealand Wildlife Service
OSNZ	Ornithological Society of New Zealand
QEII	Queen Elizabeth II
RMA	Resource Management Act
SR	Scientific Reserve
WMR	Wildlife Management Reserve
WR	Wildlife Reserve

ABSTRACT

Kaipara Ecological District lies in the Kaipara Ecological Region. The portion in the Northland Conservancy encompasses the western coast of Northland between Maunganui Bluff and North Kaipara Head, including what is known colloquially as the 'Pouto Peninsula', and the adjacent Kaihu River valley and Ruawai Plains, and covers a land area of 87 700 ha. Natural areas of ecological significance in Kaipara Ecological District (Northland Conservancy), hereafter Kaipara ED (Northland), were identified from a reconnaissance survey undertaken over the summer of 2006/2007, together with existing published and unpublished information.

Kaipara ED (Northland) embraces one of the most extensive and least modified duneland and wetland complexes in the country, of regional, national, and international significance. The District encompasses a long narrow strip mostly of consolidated sand country, bordered for much of its length by the Kaipara Harbour and its northern extension, the Northern Wairoa River. The harbour is a nationally and internationally important habitat for migratory and non-migratory bird species. Estuarine and harbour areas in the Ecological District support populations of eight 'acutely threatened', five 'chronically threatened', and eight 'at risk' bird species. Remaining indigenous ecosystems are mostly secondary and much fragmented. The most extensive are kanuka forest/shrubland and coastal sand dunes, notably the very extensive Pouto dune system, one of the best examples of a large, relatively unmodified sand dune systems remaining in New Zealand. Wetlands, both freshwater (especially those at Omamari and Maitahi) and estuarine (especially the Kaipara estuaries), flaxland, and manuka shrubland are also significant. Tall forest of any kind is rare, old-growth forest extremely rare. The old-growth forest remnants, Tapu Bush and Pretty Bush, at Pouto are outstanding. Dune lakes are a feature of the western side of the ED and have been augmented in recent decades by farm ponds.

A total of 113 natural areas was identified, comprising a total area of 23 652 ha (including fresh and the estuarine waters of Kaipara Harbour). Of these, 62 are considered to be of particular ecological significance (Level 1 sites). Although much of the former indigenous biodiversity of Kaipara ED (Northland) has undoubtedly been lost, 13% of the land area remains under indigenous vegetation. A relatively high proportion (54%) of the identified natural areas (excluding estuarine waters) is also currently legally protected, comprising 8% of the total extent of Kaipara ED (Northland). However, some ecosystems (tall forest, flaxland) are under-represented in the existing reserves network. Some 11% by area of remaining natural areas fall within land environments classified as Acutely or Chronically Threatened, but the current level of protection in any of these land environments does not exceed 2%. Twenty-one sites covering some 4% of the land area of the ED have been recommended as having priority for protection.



Map 1. Location map of Kaipara Ecological District (Northland Conservancy). Brook 1996