



PROTECTED NATURAL AREAS IN
NORTHLAND, AND CARE STANDARDS
FOR PROTECTED NATURAL AREAS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report uses available data to determine what proportion of Northland Region can be classed as Protected Natural Areas (PNA). A PNA is defined as an area of land that has formal legal status intended to protect indigenous ecosystems, vegetation, habitats, or species. Within the PNA network, different types of legislation provide different levels of protection. Some types of reserve, and areas looked after by community care groups, do not fit the definition of a PNA. A summary is provided of national and regional priorities for protection of natural values.

In total, 13.75% of the Northland Region has some sort of legal protection. This equates to 2,067 sites covering 180,336.2 ha. Of that total, 1,905 sites (*c.*87% of the total number) covering 156,451 ha (*c.* 92% of the total area) are PNAs, as they have the legal mandate to conserve natural values. The remainder of the sites may protect natural values as a by-product of reservation (legal protection for other reasons than conservation of natural values) or through management without legal protection.

Northland Region includes 24 ecological districts, of which 19 have been fully or partially surveyed. For 11 ecological districts, less than 10% of the total land area comprises PNAs. These are ordered from least area of PNA sites to highest; Otamatea, Tokatoka, Hokianga, Whangarei, Kaikohe, Rodney (part), Kerikeri, Tangihua, Pouto, Aupouri, and Waipu. Other ecological districts (Poor Knights, Three Kings, Manaia, Taranga) are nearly completely protected.

Some of these ecological districts still contain a large proportion of indigenous vegetation in Acutely Threatened or Chronically Threatened Land Environments of New Zealand (LENZ) categories (Ministry for the Environment 2007a, 2007b). However, as a general rule, PNAs within ecological districts only include a small percentage of Acutely Threatened (1.7% over total region) and Chronically Threatened (4.2% over total region) land environments.

The amount of indigenous vegetation remaining within ecological districts varies greatly. Using the Land Cover Database vs 2 (LCDB2), 11.9% of the Northland Region is a PNA, a further 5.8% is legally protected but not a PNA (i.e. the legislative mandate is not protection of natural values) or is being looked after by community or Landcare Groups. This leaves *c.*82% of Northland Region without any form of legal protection or care¹. There is considerable scope for further protection of natural values, as nearly 37% of Northland Region consists of indigenous landcover. The LCDB2 categories of native vegetation that require urgent protection are Alpine Gravel and Rock, Depleted Tussock Grassland, Estuarine Open Water and Fernland. Many other vegetation categories also warrant further protection.

¹ Note that the numbers do not quite add up as the different mapping layers LCDB2, PNA, Regional Council Territory include variable amounts of estuarine and coastal environments.

The Department of Conservation manages 92% of the area covered by PNAs (144,089 ha), Queen Elizabeth II National Trust protects 4.2% (6,587 ha), Nga Whenua Rahui 2.2% (3,718 ha), and the Whangarei District Council has protected 1.5% (2,266 ha) by means of covenants. The number of PNAs managed by the different agencies are: DOC 802 sites (42% of the sites), Whangarei District Council 613 sites (32%), QEII Trust 475 sites (25%), and Nga Whenua Rahui 15 sites (0.8%).

Within the Northland Region, 1,320 (283,947.8 ha) Natural Areas of Ecological Significance (NAES) were identified through Protected Natural Areas Programme surveys. In total, 506 NAES (37.39% of the area) are partially or fully protected by some mechanism. Of these, 444 NAES (85,535.9 ha or 31.5% of the area) are PNAs, either wholly or partially. A further 162 NAES (equalling 16,636 ha or 5.86% of the area) are partially or fully protected by mechanisms that may not protect natural values. Sixty-two percent of NAES are not protected or managed by any mechanism. Of those that are protected or managed (this includes legal protection but also efforts by community groups), nearly all NAES (98%) only have part of their total area protected. NAES can be protected by multiple mechanisms.

Whangarei District Council (WDC) has required the covenanting of 613 areas, usually as part of sub-division processes, totalling 2,266.0 ha. Nearly 50% of them (24% by area) were not NAES identified in PNAP surveys. In total, 311 NAES are fully or partially protected by WDC covenants.

A range of other mechanisms contribute to the conservation of natural values, but do not result in PNA status. These include community care groups, Council funded pest management projects, Government funded biodiversity projects, and Fish and Game reserves. The data for most of these mechanisms is often incomplete, contains errors, or in some cases is not available in a spatial (mapped) format. This limits how these data can be used.

There is currently no consistent classification of ecological features within protected areas. Descriptions of ecological areas vary within and between organisations. The only nationwide classification of vegetation cover that is relatively consistent across the entire country is the LCDB2. A consistent nationwide approach to classifying and ranking natural areas is required. The extent of all natural areas, and all areas where management is undertaken to manage natural values, needs to be mapped as GIS layers to allow better comparison and analysis.

There are no consistent standards of care between, and sometimes within, organisations. Few agencies have specified what the minimum standards of care should be, or have the means to enforce standards if they are present. Often management of PNAs can be hampered by lack of funds or other resources. General standards of care are suggested for different ecosystem types.

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