

Biodiversity Strategy

a new vision for the Hurunui District



Draft 2007

Vision Hurunui

The unique natural values of the Hurunui District are maintained and enhanced by voluntary actions in partnership with land owners.

The Hurunui District Council has a new vision for the protection of the District's biodiversity that seeks to move away from the existing method of regulating identified Significant Natural Areas through the District Plan, towards a non-regulatory, collaborative approach.

This new pathway provides many opportunities for innovative and participatory methods that will engage landowners and the community and strengthen voluntary biodiversity protection throughout Hurunui while respecting private property rights.

The two major areas of emphasis of this Strategy are:

- to encourage the voluntary, participatory involvement of landowners; and
- to develop and implement a range of new non-regulatory practices and programmes.

The Importance of Biodiversity

Biodiversity describes the variety of all life on earth.

Biodiversity includes the full gamut of the diversity amongst the individual building blocks of life – genes, to differences between entire assemblages of organisms inhabiting a particular place – ecosystems, and the essential interactions between these components that maintain life for all of us.

Most of New Zealand's indigenous biodiversity is only found here, so it helps to define our unique national identity, and forms part of the heritage of the whole world. Hurunui's indigenous biodiversity provides economic benefits and marketing opportunities, and cultural, aesthetic, and spiritual values to the District's residents, and underpins the District's attractiveness to visitors.

Healthy biodiversity provides free 'ecosystem services' to us. These include air and water purification, waste treatment and nutrient recycling, water and soil conservation, shelter, and habitat for beneficial insects, amongst other services. Maintaining indigenous biodiversity also maintains the potential for other 'goods' to be supplied in the future; for example, new pharmaceuticals, or food and fibre sources.

Statutory context

The Hurunui District Council's obligations to biodiversity are spelt out by the Resource Management Act 1991. These are:

- to recognise and provide for, as a matter of national importance, *the protection of areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna* (s6(c));
- the *...control of any actual or potential effects of the use, development, or protection of land, including for the purpose of ... the maintenance of indigenous biological diversity* (s31(1)(b)(iii)); and
- to *monitor the state of the whole or any part of the environment of its region or district to the extent that is appropriate to enable the local authority to effectively carry out its functions under this Act* (s35(2)(a)).

The Hurunui District Plan

The Hurunui District Plan was made operative in August 2003, and was last amended December 2006. Provisions of the Plan that are relevant to fulfilling biodiversity requirements include the recognition of Significant Natural Resources (Issue 2) as an important issue for the District. The Plan contains a number of Objectives and Policies that address this issue:

Objective 2

Protection and enhancement of the life supporting capacity and the ecological intrinsic, conservation and cultural values of the District's natural resources.

Policy 2.1

To identify significant natural areas within the District, including areas of indigenous vegetation, habitats of indigenous fauna, wetlands and natural features.

Policy 2.2

To avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse effects on the ecological integrity, functioning, habitat values, natural character or amenity of resources of significant natural and cultural value.

Policy 2.2a

To promote the protection of the natural character of wetlands and to sustain their life supporting capacity as indigenous ecosystems.

Policy 2.3

To promote the rehabilitation or enhancement of significant natural resources which have been adversely modified, where that enhancement will achieve a long-term improvement to the values of the resource and improve the biodiversity and life-supporting capacity of indigenous ecosystems for areas with important ecological values.

Policy 2.4

To specifically protect individual trees identified by the community as being notable.

Policy 2.5

To encourage land use activities which sustain or enhance the soil, water, ecosystem functions and natural values of the high country, in particular activities should:

- (a) Be carried out in such a way that a robust and intact vegetation cover is maintained to assist in sustaining the life supporting capacity of the soil,*
- (b) Ensure that the natural character and open space values of the high country are maintained by:*
 - (i) retaining as far as possible indigenous vegetation and habitat;*
 - (ii) maintaining unmodified landform and natural processes.*

The Natural Environment Section A7 of the Plan provides rules to achieve the stated Objectives and Policies. These protect indigenous biodiversity from clearance generally, and provide specific activity rules for Significant Natural Areas and Protected Trees.

The Significant Natural Areas rules contain two lists: recognized SNAs (Appendix 7.1); and 'potential' SNAs (Appendix 7.1(A)). General protection Rule A7.2.2 applied to both lists, however, the protection of potential SNAs expired two years after the Plan was made operative under the provisions of Rule A7.2.2(d). This rule was not extended, though the general clearance rule on indigenous biodiversity on potential SNAs is still applicable, and these areas will be addressed through Council's broader Biodiversity Strategy.

The Hurunui District Council aims to work collaboratively with the community to maintain biodiversity values so as to preclude the need for listing SNAs in the District Plan. The SNAs lists have created an historical barrier between the Council and the community, and the Council wishes, in the future, to co-operate with private landowners and other agencies to overcome these difficulties while respecting private property rights.

The District Plan is due for review in 2013. It will be necessary for the Council to have established a proven track record of partnership with landowners, and demonstrate measurable gains in the District's biodiversity values, to be able to move to exclude SNA regulation from the next District Plan.

Biodiversity Strategy for the Canterbury Region

The Canterbury Biodiversity Strategy Advisory Group was formed in mid 2006 to:

- provide a forum for key stakeholders and agencies to work collaboratively to provide constructive and focused feedback on, and input to, the development of a Biodiversity Strategy for the Canterbury region;
- ensure the buy-in of key stakeholders and agencies to the Regional Biodiversity Strategy; and
- encourage “on-the-ground champions” of the Regional Biodiversity Strategy within key stakeholder and agency organizations.

The Advisory Group has comprehensive representation drawn from central and local government, Ngai Tahu, conservation interest groups and trusts, commercial and recreational interests, and expert individuals. Hurunui District is regularly represented on the Advisory Group.

On behalf of the Advisory Group, Environment Canterbury released *A Biodiversity Strategy for the Canterbury Region* in November 2007. It is anticipated that the Hurunui District Council will sign the Charter of Adoption for this document to

acknowledge the importance of Canterbury's biodiversity and our role in sustaining it. While the Canterbury Regional Biodiversity is a non-binding, non-statutory document, we are committed to working collaboratively with our Strategy partners, communities and landowners to implement the Strategy and to achieve positive biodiversity outcomes for the Canterbury region¹.

in recognition that the regional strategy is aligned with the aims of the Hurunui District Biodiversity Strategy, will support inter-agency and cross-boundary management of Hurunui's biodiversity, and has been developed collaboratively.

In the event that Council doesn't adopt the Charter at this time the Council is still free to pursue its own Biodiversity Strategy for the Hurunui District. However, a coordinated approach has additional benefits including: sharing of resources; consistency across the region; and provides a wider support network for councils and landowner groups.

¹ *(Draft) Charter of Adoption for the Canterbury Region Biodiversity Strategy.* (Environment Canterbury, July 2007).

National Biodiversity Policy

The New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy was reviewed independently in 2006 and a number of priority actions were recommended:

- agreeing and implementing key environmental indicators appropriate for statutory monitoring and reporting requirements;
- setting quantifiable targets to measure progress against every 5 years;
- setting objectives to address the potential impacts of climate change; and
- establishing strategic partnership linkages between local government, communities, and sustainable development initiatives.

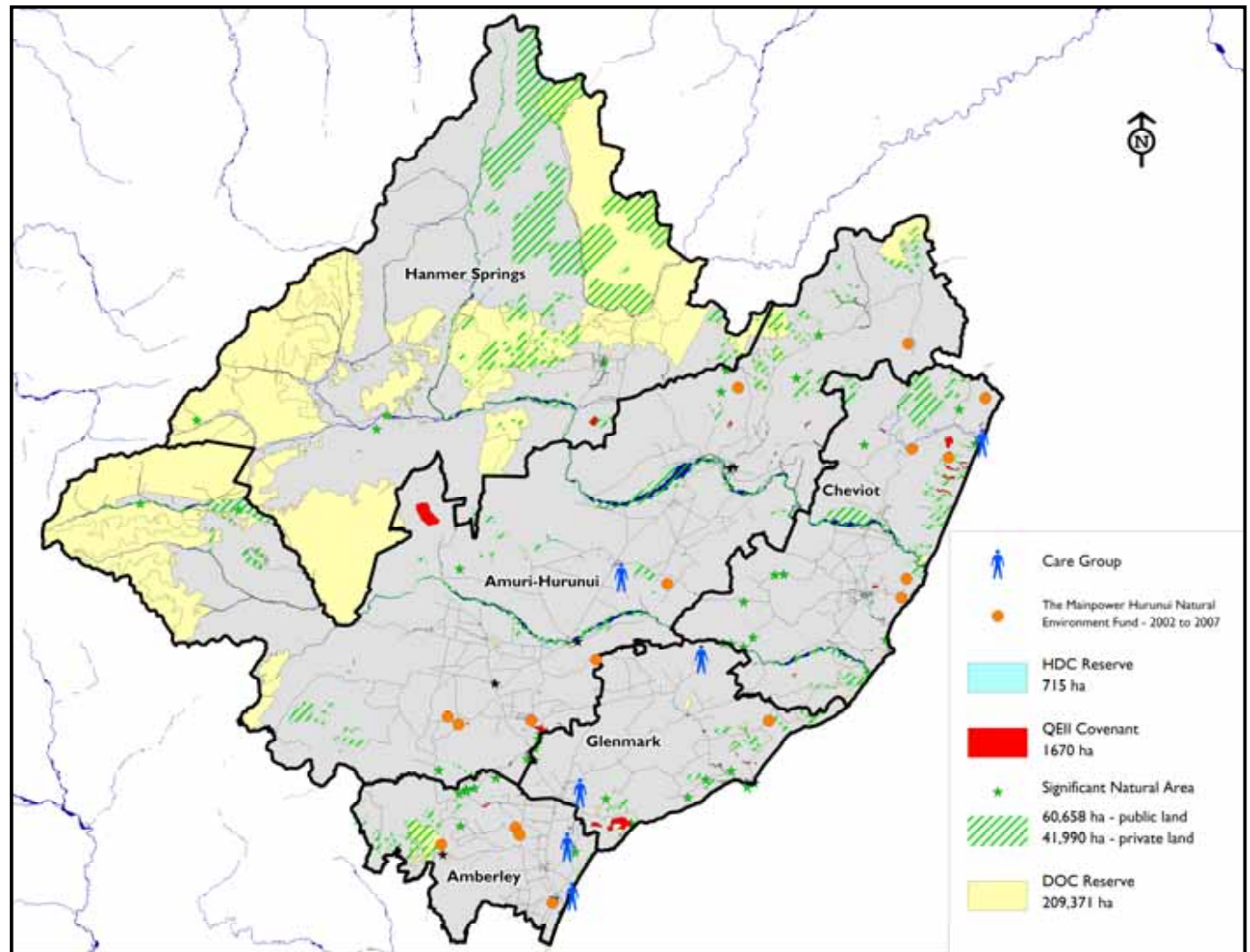
The review notes that there are opportunities to strengthen biodiversity considerations within sustainable development initiatives, particularly in agriculture, through underlining the principle that it is much cheaper to maintain natural systems than it is to pay the repair bill, or to suffer the resulting loss of production.

Central Government has signalled that it will not be proceeding with a National Policy Statement on biodiversity and intends to take a non-statutory approach to this issue, which will enable councils to respond to biodiversity issues in ways that suit their particular circumstances in confidence that the work aligns with nationally identified priorities for biodiversity protection. The effectiveness of this programme will be monitored and reported on by 2011 to determine if other forms of national direction are required.

The MfE released *Protecting our Places: Information about the Statement of National Priorities for Protecting Rare and Threatened Biodiversity on Private Land* in April, 2007. One of the priorities for action included in the report was for the protection, maintenance and restoration of areas where <20% indigenous cover remains. Under this criterion, parts of the Hurunui District have been identified as Acutely Threatened areas for priority action in the view of the MfE. The Hurunui Strategy as drafted will be implemented on a whole of district basis.

Snapshot Hurunui

Total area 864,639 ha
Population 11,589
Protected area 29.35 %
Mountain-fed rivers Conway
 Waiau
 Hurunui
 Kowai
 Waipara



Methods

The Biodiversity Strategy uses a 'toolbox' of non-regulatory methods to promote the voluntary protection and enhancement of biodiversity throughout the District.

Coordination

The central government's Biodiversity Advice Fund has approved a grant to the Hurunui District Council to fund a Biodiversity Enhancement Officer to co-ordinate biodiversity initiatives with willing landowners.

The Biodiversity Enhancement Officer's role is to provide advocacy and education at one-on-one or landowner group level to encourage voluntary means to protect biodiversity on private land. The project will be closely targeted to farmers. The 'bottom-line' objective is to encourage more landowners to fence and protect areas of indigenous vegetation and waterways. The methods to be used include:

- producing/supplying education materials;
- holding workshops/field days;
- supporting/instigating the establishment of landcare groups;
- making ecological expertise available to landowners who want to access it;
- public recognition for landowners who are achieving grants (if they want it);
- helping landowners apply to contestable funds; and
- coordinating efforts with other agencies engaged in the same work.

Leading by example

The Council has a large and varied property portfolio to demonstrate its commitment to the Biodiversity Strategy. The Council intends to review this portfolio to identify ecological restoration opportunities as keystones for a programme that sees Council at the forefront of biodiversity and "Leading by Example". This may lead to reduced operating costs in the long term as well.

The Council will also review the way it manages its property. Where appropriate, future works on Council property will:

- ensure that new amenity plantings contain a minimum 60% of local species as defined in guidelines to be developed;
- undertake weed and pest control initiatives that promote indigenous biodiversity;
- manage roadside berms to reduce weed habitat and facilitate re-generation;
- maintain weed hygiene around depots, quarries and supply dumps to reduce invasion pathways;
- fence and re-vegetate riparian margins, where appropriate;
- train contractors to recognize and appropriately manage native and weed species; and
- align asset management plans and contract documentation with the Biodiversity Strategy.

Supporting community efforts

The Council will provide opportunities for the community to undertake practical projects on public land that promote and enhance local biodiversity. Likely benefits include increased community ownership, better utilization, increased surveillance and safety, and reduced vandalism and dumping. To support these voluntary efforts, the Council will provide the following resources:

- staff time for group co-ordination, technical advice, risk analysis and management, and supervision (at least initially);
- staff assistance with preparing funding applications;
- site preparation if required;
- assistance with providing plants, mulch, and weed/rubbish disposal;
- an award scheme to recognize successful projects; and
- work with other agencies promoting similar objectives to avoid duplication and maximise the use of financial resources.

Advocacy

The Council website, the Hurunui News Council page, and Council offices and library displays all provide opportunities to actively promote biodiversity. In addition to suitable material that has already been developed by other agencies, Council will supply information specific to the Hurunui District on:

- the care and restoration of biodiversity and waterways, targeted to urban, lifestyle and rural landowners;
- native species lists for various situations and purpose e.g. shelter, amenity, attracting birds;
- weed identification and control;
- profiles of threatened species; and
- profiles of 'notable trees', their history and relevance to the District.

Celebration

Many landowners throughout the District successfully protect biodiversity within their working landscapes by maintaining a tradition of stewardship inherited from earlier generations. Where the landowners are willing, public recognition of these 'biodiversity heroes' will be made to inspire others.

Similarly, projects which demonstrate that protecting biodiversity values makes good commercial sense will be promoted accordingly.

Information services

The Biodiversity Enhancement Officer will provide a single conduit for all biodiversity-related queries, which will enable that officer to develop a rapport with individual landowners.

Where appropriate, site visits by other Council officers will be used to promote biodiversity issues around the District. Liaison with local nurseries and plant retailers will raise awareness of sales of potentially invasive plants.

Education

Education about biodiversity is an investment in the future that can provide maximum returns for minimum efforts. Biodiversity education is most effective when targeted to primary and intermediate school age children within the national curricula. As per advocacy, appropriate resources exist that will be adapted for local use. Activities that will be used to engage school children in biodiversity include:

- Arbor Day and commemorative plantings;
- planting events on local reserves and within school grounds;
- field trips;
- monitoring bush health and water quality; and
- art competitions.

Rates relief

Rates remission under the Local Government (Rating) Act 200 is commonly used by councils throughout New Zealand as a method of encouraging landowners to protect values on their land. Current Hurunui District Council policy provides for 100% remission of rates on land covered by a QEII Trust Open Space Covenant. This will be extended to provide for rates remission at a similar or lesser rate for other types of conservation covenants.

It is recognised that there is a cost to landowners who have Significant Natural Area sites on their land. Therefore, the feasibility of providing rates remission on these areas will be investigated. Any remission, would need to be relevant to the biodiversity value, level of protection, and productive use (if any) of the area.

Development rights

Transferable Development Rights (TDRs) are economic instruments that enable the trading of development opportunities on an open market as a financial incentive for the protection of land. This involves the Council consenting to a landholder to 'transfer' a development right (that either exists under the district plan or is granted in exchange for protection of an area) from one title to another.

Some district plans permit additional development rights in exchange for the protection of indigenous biodiversity through an appropriate legal instrument e.g. the subdivision of additional lots where the scheme plan creates a bush or wetland remnant covenant on the parent property.

The Hurunui District Plan currently has no provisions for TDRs or additional development rights. The Council will investigate the appropriateness of these methods for biodiversity protection in the Hurunui District.

Financial contributions

Subdivision and subsequent development have a significant impact on biodiversity, through habitat loss and fragmentation. In recognition of this, the Council will investigate dedicating a portion of the financial contributions from all new lots created to fund biodiversity protection and enhancement works on public land.

Grants

The MainPower Hurunui Natural Environment Fund is an annual contestable fund valued at \$10,000. The fund is available for work on private or public land that restores, reinstates or otherwise benefits indigenous natural qualities with \$7,000 allocated for the protection of existing indigenous qualities, and \$3,000 for reinstatement projects. As the fund is consistently over-subscribed, the Council will endeavour to source additional funding in partnership with appropriate sponsors.

There are many regional and national funds with biodiversity foci that landowners and the Council can use for the benefit of the Hurunui District. These funding sources will be adequately promoted, and assistance with completing applications will be provided if required.

Monitoring

A number of indicators relevant to biodiversity are already monitored in the Hurunui District. These will be reported on at a District scale, and won't be referenced to specific sites without the landowner's agreement. The information that is collected includes:

- river water quality;
- the total area of land under legal protection;
- funded protection and enhancement works;
- the extent of animal and plant pests;
- land cover changes;
- the number of resource consents in high natural value areas; and
- public perceptions of the natural environment.

These indicators are next due to be reported on in the State of the District Report for 2008.

Key performance indicators specific to volunteer community efforts that will be reported include:

- number of groups;
- number and type of projects;
- number of events held;
- number of units planted; and
- volunteer labour hours.

In addition, Council will seek opportunities to work with other local and central government agencies and organisations to develop environmental indicators appropriate for monitoring changes in the state of biodiversity in the district, and for evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of management, policies and allocation of resources.

Review

The Biodiversity Strategy will be reviewed in 2010.

Action points

1. *Coordination*

- 1.1. Appoint a Biodiversity Enhancement Officer through the use of external funding by a target date of March 2008

2. *Leading by example*

- 2.1. Establish an inventory of potential biodiversity projects on Council land and provide funding to initiate programmes on these sites in the 2008/09 Annual Plan and successive plans.
- 2.2. Align Council property works with the Biodiversity Strategy.
- 2.3. Update management plans and contract documentation.
- 2.4. Train contractors as required.

3. *Supporting community efforts*

- 3.1. Provide suitable sites in response to community initiatives.
- 3.2. Allocate staff time for facilitation.
- 3.3. Provide material resources as appropriate.
- 3.4. Initiate an award scheme.

4. *Advocacy*

- 4.1. Host a Biodiversity Strategy page on the website.
- 4.2. Collate and develop written resources for landowners, organizations, and voluntary groups.
- 4.3. Maintain permanent stands of written resources in public places.

5. *Celebration*

- 5.1. Regularly publicise successful biodiversity projects with the permission of the participants.

6. *Information services*

- 6.1. Train Council field staff as required.
- 6.2. Liaise with local nurseries and plant retailers.

7. *Education*

- 7.1. Provide suitable sites for school initiatives.
- 7.2. Allocate staff time for facilitation of initiatives by landowners, organizations, and voluntary groups.
- 7.3. Provide material resources as appropriate for landowners, organizations, and voluntary groups.
- 7.4. Initiate an annual biodiversity art competition.

8. *Rates relief*

- 8.1. Extend rates remission to other conservation covenants.
- 8.2. Investigate rates remission for SNA areas.

9. *Development rights*

- 9.1. Investigate transferable development rights for biodiversity protection.
- 9.2. Investigate additional development rights for biodiversity protection.

10. *Financial contributions*

- 10.1. Investigate a financial contribution for biodiversity.

11. *Grants*

- 11.1. Seek additional biodiversity grant sponsorship.
- 11.2. Publicise other sources of biodiversity funding.