



# Voluntary protection of natural areas on private land

We can all be part of protecting, restoring and connecting Auckland's biodiversity.

In the Auckland region, natural habitats for native plants and animals have been greatly reduced or damaged as land has been developed to accommodate Auckland's constantly growing population. The importance of protecting and restoring our remaining biodiversity\* is being increasingly recognised by local, regional and national government. The protection and restoration of much of the region's biodiversity is dependent on landowner and community efforts and initiatives – particularly on private land.

This brochure provides an outline of what you can do to help enhance biodiversity values on your property and information on the range of legal and funding options, which are available to assist. There are a number of mechanisms available, which allow you to protect the biodiversity values whilst continuing to derive income from your land.

Voluntary protection options include **active management** to protect the biodiversity values of the natural area e.g. through fencing, pest control and planting and **legal protection**. Landowners often choose to do both, so their on-the-ground efforts are protected and continued into the future.

\*Biodiversity is short for biological diversity. It means the variety of all living things: plants, animals and micro-organisms; the genes they carry and the land and water ecosystems of which they are a part.

Biodiversity has been evolving since the beginning of life. It provides us with fresh air, clean water and fertile soil and is the basis of the interconnected web of life on earth.

**Protect. Restore. Connect.**

## Active management

Natural areas such as forest fragments and wetlands are vulnerable to pest animal damage, weed invasion, livestock grazing and trampling, wind exposure, and they are often physically isolated from similar areas. Active management can improve plant establishment and growth, reduce wind damage and reduce the effects of introduced pests on native plants, birds, bats, lizards and invertebrates. In most cases, some form of ongoing active management will be required to achieve improvements in the condition of natural areas and their biodiversity and subsequent successful management may reduce the need for further intervention.

**Active management may include some or all of the following:**

- fencing off the area from stock
- eradicating or controlling pest plants and animals
- planting native vegetation – within or around the area
- reconnecting isolated remnants.

For more information on these management options and how they might be applied to different ecosystem types (e.g. wetland, forest or coastal area), please refer to our biodiversity factsheet series available online at [www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz) or call 09 301 0101 for hardcopies of the factsheets. Council biodiversity advisors can provide site-specific active management advice (including site visits) and can be contacted on 09 301 0101 or email [biodiversity@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:biodiversity@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz).



## Working together

Individual landowners may work alone or collectively to undertake restoration and protection efforts on a variety of scales. In most cases, working across a larger area will bring greater benefits and be more effective, requiring less overall input in the long-term.

Community groups often form when people develop an interest in a certain aspect of the environment or a specific environment or species in their area, and decide to do something to assist in its rehabilitation or protection. Community groups can be any size and can be an unofficial



gathering of like-minded people or an official registered group. Community groups are usually led by members of the community but often involve interaction with government agencies, schools, educational institutions and research organisations.

For more information on active management and restoration and/or information on environmentally focused community groups, please refer to the Auckland Council website [www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz).

## Legal protection

There are a number of mechanisms which allow you to protect the natural values of an area while continuing to own the land.

### Covenants

A covenant is a legal agreement to protect land with important natural values and is the most common form of legal protection on private land in Auckland. Covenants are normally in perpetuity and therefore bind both the current and future landowners. An agreed document is drawn up outlining the rights and responsibilities of each party and it is then registered against the title of the property. There are four main ways of covenanting:

- a conservation covenant with the Department of Conservation, Council, or other authorised body
- an open space covenant with the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust (QEII)
- a kawenata covenant which is also available through QEII for Maori landowners
- a Nga Whenua Rahui Kawenata, which is between the Minister of Conservation and Maori landowners.

The covenanting body and the landowner share a mutual interest to protect the covenant. Ongoing management and monitoring are often part of this relationship.

### Case Study: Protecting stepping stones

When forests become fragmented, populations of native plants and animals exist in pockets rather than large continuous ecosystems. Large gaps between natural areas can create dispersal barriers for native animals, preventing new populations establishing and animals foraging for food. This is why "stepping stone" remnants are so important because they enable species to move from one area to another. Knowing this is what motivated Robert and Kaye Hamilton to protect the forest remnants and wetland areas on their Awhitu Peninsula property, when they bought it back in the late 1980s.

Over the years Robert and Kaye have committed a lot of time and effort to beautifying their farm and enhancing its biodiversity values. Possums were a big problem in the early days - a two hour hunting session would regularly yield 100. With help from Auckland Council and the Awhitu Landcare Possum Control Scheme possums have been pretty much eradicated and the forty-odd bait stations placed throughout the forested areas are scarcely touched these days. Stock damage was also evident on the forest floor and along stream edges. They were using hot-wire fencing to keep stock out of these places but started to look for more secure protection options around six or seven years ago. That's when they got in touch with the QEII National Trust and eventually decided to protect the natural areas with covenants. With permanent fencing in place, pests removed and some well-planned plantings, recovery and regeneration in the covenanted areas has been rapid.

"The western end of our farm is red with pohutukawa blooms in early summer now, and watching the birdlife from our deck gives us so much pleasure," Kaye said.

"We understand the importance of the "stepping stones" remnants running across the farm and out to other neighbouring patches and are very happy knowing that, now they are covenanted, no-one will be ever be able to touch them."

Robert and Kaye Hamilton and one of the QEII covenanted areas on their Awhitu farm.



### Protected Private Land Agreements

Protected private land agreements are organised by the Department of Conservation to protect land under the Reserves Act. Notice of the agreement is registered on the title and provides a similar level of protection as a covenant. As the landholder, you retain ownership.

### Management Agreement

This is a legal contract between the Department of Conservation and the landowner to manage an area in accordance with an agreed set of conservation objectives. It is not registered on the title and a new agreement would need to be negotiated if the property changed hands.

### Maori Reservation

This status may be placed over any Maori freehold or general land on the recommendation of the Maori Land Court under Section 337 of the Maori Land Act 1993. The reservation may be used for a wide range of purposes including protection of urupa, catchment and water supply values, and scenic, ecological or historic values.

## Other options

For those who wish to ensure the land will be protected, but do not wish to retain title, there are several options available:

### Outright sale and purchase

There are two government funds which have been set up to provide funding for the protection of important natural areas on private land: the Nature Heritage Fund and Nga Whenua Rahui. Organisations willing to acquire land in order to protect and manage it (such as The NZ Native Forests Restoration Trust and the Department of Conservation) can make bids to these funds. The funds may also purchase properties on their own initiative. Because funding is limited, a co-operative approach is preferred where costs are shared between two or more parties.

### Gifts and bequests

You can gift land or funding to any of the agencies mentioned in this brochure. A number of valuable properties have been protected in this way.

### The Land Acquisition Fund

This is a fund administered by the Department of Conservation under the Reserves Act. When public land held as a reserve is sold, the proceeds from sale go back into the Land Acquisition Fund for future purchases of high value reserve land which can include areas on private land. Given the limited funding available, other sources of funding should be approached first and a co-operative approach to any purchase is desirable. Any purchases are a reflection of the department's priorities for ecological protection established throughout the country.

## What about public access?

In most agreements over private land, public access is at the discretion of the landowner. While some are happy for the public to enjoy the values on the site, the choice is still the landowner's and permission would need to be sought by the public.

## Funding

Often a key question when desiring to protect natural areas on private land is funding and what financial assistance is available to support biodiversity protection and restoration.

In the Auckland region, the following funding options are currently available:

### Auckland Council

Funding for biodiversity protection and restoration work including pest plant and animal control, fencing and native planting is available from the Auckland Council. The council provides funding, practical support and advice to individuals, community groups, schools, trusts and organisations supporting community-led initiatives that help communities protect and enhance their local environment.



Kererū in tree – Rob Suisted

There are a number of sources of funding available to support environmental projects. For more information visit [www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/funding](http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/funding) or contact the Auckland Council Environmental Funding staff on [environmentalfunding@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:environmentalfunding@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz) or phone 09 301 0101.

Council biodiversity advisors are available to assist with funding applications and to provide site-specific restoration and protection advice – including site visits. To request this support phone 09 301 0101 or email [biodiversity@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:biodiversity@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz)

Support for pest plant and animal control is also available under the Community Initiatives Programme in the Regional Pest Management Strategy 2007-2012. Contact the council's community biosecurity co-ordinator on 09 301 0101 for more information.

### Case Study: Making a difference

In 2007 Max and Helen Kidd bought their 109 hectare dry stock property near Wellsford. The property contains a variety of landscape features including steep hill country, gullies, streams, wetlands and 22 hectares of mature and regenerating native forest. The Kidds named the property Putaputawai ("many, many waters") and from very early on, saw how special their property was and wanted to protect the streams and bush in perpetuity. Max and Helen decided to make a significant change to their property.

Max and Helen investigated covenanting the bush on their property and met with the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust (QEII) and council biodiversity staff to discuss the benefits of covenants, fencing and riparian planting. They found that there were eight QEII protected covenants within 5km of their property. By covenanting their bush block and fencing and planting stream banks (riparian areas) they would add to the continuous native forest cover in the area and provide native vegetation corridors to two other existing council Bushlot Covenants upstream. Vegetation corridors provide valuable habitat for native wildlife and plants and allow wildlife such as native geckos, kererū and tomtits to move between bush blocks using the protection and shelter of the vegetation cover.

*Continued overleaf*

### **Continued: Case Study: Making a difference**

Their property features several regenerating gullies and wetlands which feed into a central permanently flowing stream that dissects the entire property. Stock had access to the streams and bush and their continued intrusion into these areas was a considerable risk to their long-term viability as well as contributing to stock management issues.

Max and Helen decided to protect their bush and wetlands under a QEll covenant and apply for assistance with fencing and planting their bush, riparian and wetland areas from council's environmental funding. They also received funding from the Biodiversity Condition Fund and funded a proportion of the restoration work themselves. Max says "financial assistance was a no brainer really" and he would highly recommend the council's environmental funding to other landowners working on ecological restoration projects.

The Kidds completed the fencing and planting of their bush, streams and wetland areas over 4 years. Management of the covenanted areas is on-going with the Kidds undertaking weed control in the newly planted areas and controlling pest animals. They continue to receive ongoing support with animal pest control (bait and traps) from the Council's biosecurity team. Max has been impressed with the benefits of the restoration project - not just for nature but also for farming. The stock carrying capacity of the property has increased and a centrally fenced raceway helps move stock around the property and reduces animal losses in the bush and streams. Max is an advocate for fencing and protection of natural areas in his farming community.

"I tell them to think of the future. It's a better utilization of pasture. You don't have to chase animals through the bush. I really can't sing the praises of the funding agencies enough."

Max and Helen Kidd, making a difference in Wellsford



### **Biodiversity Condition and Advice Funds**

The Biodiversity Condition Fund and the Biodiversity Advice Fund provide financial assistance to private landowners and community groups seeking to improve or maintain the condition of existing indigenous (native) vegetation, species and habitats on private land.

Eligible applicants include private land owners and managers; local and regional government; professional and community based organisations and local, regional and national umbrella groups. Central government departments are not eligible for funding.

The funds are a Crown fund administered by the Department of Conservation (DoC).



Forest gecko – Dylan van Winkel

## Biodiversity Condition Fund

Aim:

- To improve and maintain the condition of areas of nationally significant indigenous vegetation, species and habitats on private land.
- To broaden the base of community effort in indigenous biodiversity management.
- To complement landowner contributions and leverage contributions from other sources for biodiversity on private land.

Scope:

The Condition Fund supports projects designed to protect and enhance indigenous vegetation, species and habitats located on private land. These projects could involve, for example, fencing, pest control, weed control or infill planting. The Fund focuses on the protection/enhancement of existing native biodiversity values of national significance.

## Biodiversity Advice Fund

The Biodiversity Advice Fund focuses on providing information and advice to private land owners. It funds projects which encourage landholders or groups to better protect indigenous species on their land, and equips them with the knowledge to do so. Advice Fund projects include restoration management plans, ecological reports, workshops, field-days and publications.

## Queen Elizabeth II National Trust

Where a landowner is interested in working in partnership with Queen Elizabeth II National Trust and establishing a covenanted area, the Trust may assist with establishment costs like fencing and survey. The Trust also usually covers the administration and cost of registering the Open Space Covenant on the title to the land.

## The Nature Heritage Fund

The Nature Heritage Fund is a contestable fund established by Central Government for voluntary protection of nature on private land. Assistance may be given with fencing, surveying and some legal costs.

## The Nga Whenua Rahui Fund

Nga Whenua Rahui is a contestable Ministerial fund which provides funding for the protection of indigenous ecosystems on Maori land. Its scope covers the full range of natural diversity originally present in the landscape. Assistance is available for fencing and pest control on the protected areas and the fund covers the expenses associated with registration and legal costs. Organisations representative of hapu and iwi can apply.

## Who to contact?

To find out more about any of the above protection and restoration options (and other opportunities) and for information about the natural areas on your land, please contact the relevant agency listed below:

### Auckland Council

Phone: 09 301 0101

Email: [biodiversity@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:biodiversity@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz)

Address: Biodiversity Team

Infrastructure and Environmental Service

Auckland Council, Private Bag 92300

Auckland 1142

Website: [www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz)

### Queen Elizabeth II National Trust

Phone: 04 472 6626

Address: P O Box 3341 Wellington

Website: [www.openspace.org.nz](http://www.openspace.org.nz)

### Biodiversity Condition and Advice Funds

Phone: 0800 86 2020

Address: Biodiversity Funds,

Department of Conservation

P O Box 10420 Wellington 6143

Website: <http://www.biodiversity.govt.nz/land/nzbs/pvtland/condition.html>

### Nature Heritage Fund

Phone: 04 471 0726

Address: P O Box 10420 Wellington 6143

Website: [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)

### Nga Whenua Rahui

The Kaitakawaenga

Phone: 0800 112771

Address: PO Box 10420 Wellington 6143

Email: [kaitakawaenga@doc.govt.nz](mailto:kaitakawaenga@doc.govt.nz)

Website: [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)

### Department of Conservation

Conservancy and Local Area Offices

Website: [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)

### Forest and Bird

Auckland Northern Regional Office

Phone: 09 302 0203

Fax: 09 303 4548

Address: 34A Charlotte Street

Newton

PO Box 108 055, Symonds Street

Auckland 1150

Website: [www.forestandbird.org.nz](http://www.forestandbird.org.nz)

### New Zealand Plant Conservation Network

Address: P O Box 16102 Wellington

Website: [www.nzpcn.org.nz](http://www.nzpcn.org.nz)

### New Zealand Landcare Trust

Phone: 0800 526 322

Address: P O Box 3026 Onerahi

Whangarei 0142

Website: [www.landcare.org.nz](http://www.landcare.org.nz)