

Environmental trends and priorities

1. Introduction

The current environmental values of the parks and forests relate to their ecosystems and the degree to which they are in a healthy functioning state. While sections on environmental trends in land and freshwater are relevant, the focus on the environmental trends here will be on biodiversity. This is because land use (such as farming) within the parks serves as a land management tool, rather than as an outcome in itself and trends for freshwater quality can be covered under biodiversity (because of the strong correlation between the two).

2. Information from the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy Review

The New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy (NZBS) was developed in 2000 and reflects New Zealand's commitment to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity 1993. It sets out national goals and principles for managing New Zealand's biodiversity. Goal 3 is the most relevant to Greater Wellington Regional Council's (GWRC) parks and forests. This goal, which was strongly endorsed by Council, is to: *Halt the decline in New Zealand's indigenous biodiversity.*

An assessment of progress on the goals of the NZBS was completed as part of a review in 2005 (Green and Clarkson, 2005). Relevant points detailed in the Executive Summary of the document (for GWRC's parks and forests) are shown below.

Positive outcomes have been:

- Intensive management in mainland islands and sanctuaries
- More strategies and plans for protecting threatened species
- A major rise in community biodiversity projects.

Broader trends are:

- Ongoing loss of threatened biodiversity from private lands
- Dominance of economic drivers that favour the degradation of ecosystems (such as wetlands), rather than their active maintenance
- Adverse impacts of animal pests on threatened species and ecosystems
- Serious declines in the status of many acute or chronically threatened species
- Continuing spread of pest fish, aquatic weeds and growing numbers of weed species

- Negative impacts of fishing on many ecosystem processes.

Other relevant points in the review are:

- (1) Substantial progress has been made in increased weed and pest control efforts but it is a high future priority to maintain those gains. It is much cheaper to maintain natural systems than it is to pay the repair bill.
- (2) Unfortunately biodiversity loss is continuing. Most of the threatened biodiversity is now in the most modified and least protected environments - the lowland and coastal areas. Moderate progress has been made on restoration programmes but again the future priority score for that work is high.
- (3) The status of freshwater systems and their indigenous species has declined in many regions and is now a national economic, as well as environmental, concern to the public. Land use intensification over the last two decades is causing a loss of habitat for indigenous species. The report mentions “sympathetic management”, i.e., managing productive lands in a way that recognises or supports the needs of indigenous biodiversity. For the parks and forests, this would mean the development and implementation of sustainable land management plans for those parks with farms.

3. National priorities for protecting rare and threatened native biodiversity on private land

In April 2007 the Government issued a set of national priorities for native biodiversity (Protecting our places, 2007). GWRC managed lands in this context are regarded as private land, as they are not part of the Department of Conservation estate. The four national priorities closely reflect the priorities GWRC has identified for the Region (Biodiversity Co-ordinating Group, 2008), i.e., the most ecologically vulnerable areas that need protection and restoration efforts are: lowland forest, rivers and lakes, wetlands, dunes, coastal escarpments and gravel beaches.

4. Future trends in the parks and forests

- (1) Good progress has been made in pest animal and plant control and in the mainland islands. This work should be maintained.
- (2) Restoration efforts on threatened ecosystem types such as wetlands, dunes and lowland forest, should also be continued.
- (3) Sustainable land management plans for those parks with farms should be developed and implemented.

Revegetation is the key to (2) and (3). If possible, revegetation efforts should be increased.

5. References

Biodiversity Co-ordinating Group, 2008

Biodiversity Implementation Plan 2008-12

Green, W and Clarkson, B. 2005

Turning the Tide? A review of the first five years of the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy. The Synthesis Report.

Ministry for the Environment, 2007

State of the Environment Report, selected pages.

Ministry for the Environment, Department of Conservation, 2007

Protecting Our Places- Introducing the national priorities for protecting rare and threatened native biodiversity on private land