

Reducing possum numbers in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Forest

Important information – 1080 possum control operation

Greater Wellington and Wellington Water Limited (WWL) are undertaking an aerial possum control operation in the Wainuiomata Regional Park and the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area, using the pesticide, sodium fluoroacetate (1080).

Area

The operational area covers approximately 7,200 hectares, located in the Remutaka Ranges, east of Wainuiomata (see map attached). The area includes the Wainuiomata Regional Park and Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area, where no public access is permitted.

All land within the operational area is owned by Greater Wellington. Most of it is managed as a source of water for treatment and supply to Wellington, Porirua, Lower Hutt and Upper Hutt cities.

OSPRI NZ had planned to undertake an aerial 1080 operation in this area in 2024. However, that operation did not proceed due to unsuitable weather conditions.

Why are we doing it?

We need to protect this area from the impacts of possums to preserve its distinctive native forest. The area has been identified as a Key Native Ecosystem site due to its high natural values. The forest is largely unchanged since Europeans arrived in New Zealand and includes the largest and most pristine lowland forest in the lower North Island. It is significant habitat for native bird species such as tītipounamu (rifleman), pōpokatea (whitehead), koekoeā (long-tailed cuckoo), kākārīki and kiwi.

Protection of the forest habitat is vital to ensure it is healthy and able to support our native plants and animals and ensure their long-term survival.

We also need to preserve water quality and minimise the treatment of water for supply. Possums degrade the forest ecosystems that have a positive impact on water quality. If the health of the forest is allowed to degrade, it will eventually impact the catchment's ability to provide healthy fresh water for our communities.

The main control method being used has the additional benefit of controlling rats and stoats. Rats will die when they consume possum baits, while stoats will be killed when they consume the carcasses of poisoned rats and possums. A reduction in these introduced predators will further protect native plants and birds.

Timeline

26 May 2025 onwards: the application of nontoxic, tan coloured prefeed pellets will occur.

2 June 2025 onwards: the application of green coloured pellets containing the biodegradable pesticide, 1080 will occur.

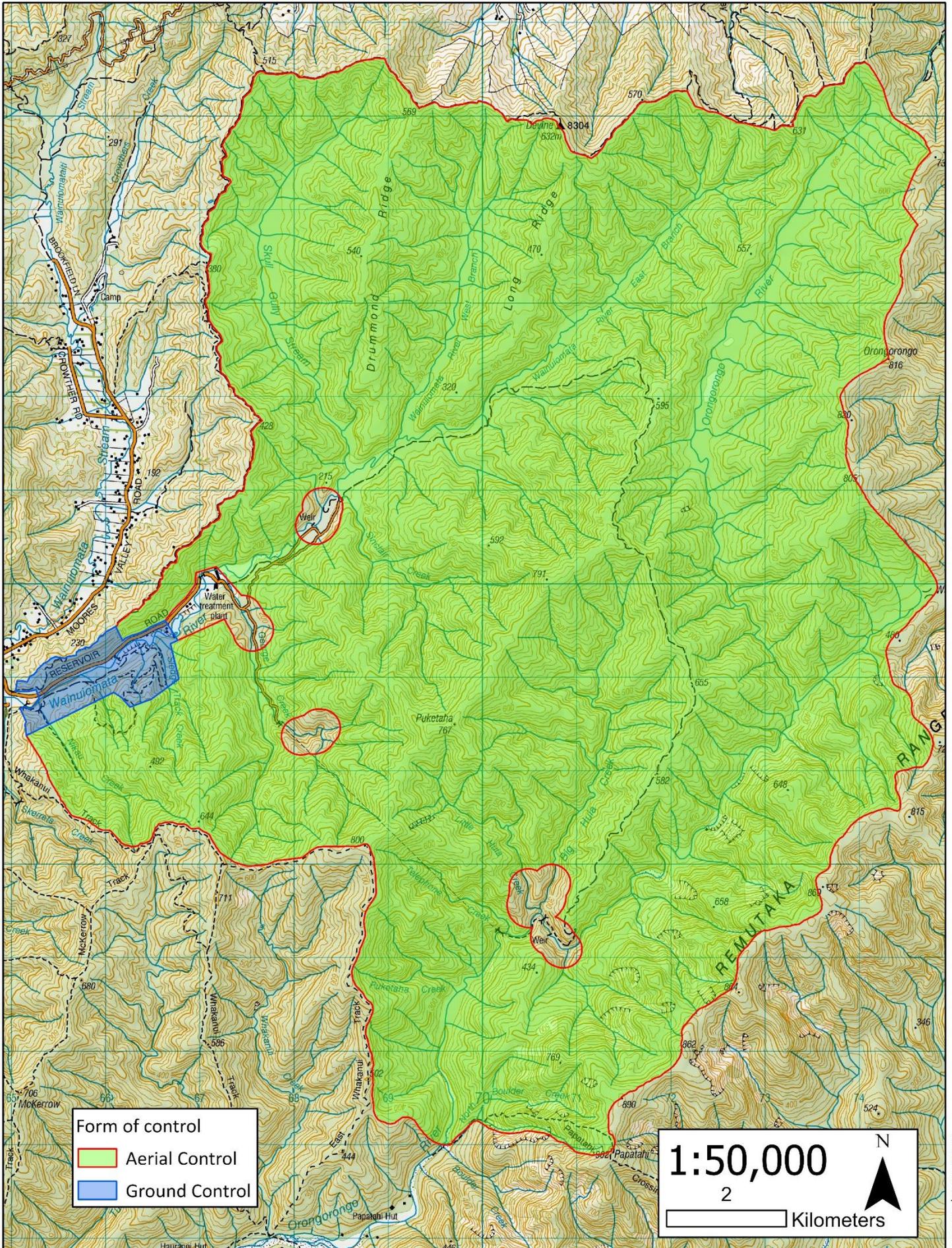
Both applications are subject to suitable weather conditions. If the prefeed application is delayed the 1080 application will also be delayed.

Planning and permissions

The operation is subject to strict safety, quality-assurance and monitoring requirements. Helicopters will be equipped with Global Positioning System (GPS) navigational technology to ensure bait is accurately placed within agreed operational areas, and not within identified exclusions zones.

The use of 1080 requires consent from the Medical Officer of Health. We must comply with the Hazardous Substances & New Organisms Act, the Resource Management Act and the Health and Safety at Work Act.





Aerial control method

First, non-toxic tan-coloured “pre-feed” cereal pellets will be sown by helicopter within the operational area. This gives possums a taste for the bait, encouraging them to eat the toxic pellets once they are sown. The pre-feeding process increases possum searching and feeding behaviour, increasing control effectiveness.

About five to ten days after the non-toxic pellets are sown, helicopters will sow cereal pellets containing the pesticide sodium fluoroacetate (1080). 1080 pellets are 20mm in diameter, cinnamon lured and coloured green to make them unattractive to birds.

1080 pellets contain 0.15% of 1080 and will be applied at a rate of 2kg per hectare. That’s the equivalent of less than one small laundry powder box of pellets per rugby-field-sized area.



Pre-feed pellets



1080 pellets

Why are we using this method?

Aerial control is particularly suited for this operation given the size and nature of the operational area. Aerial control is a highly effective, cost-efficient and safe method of controlling mammalian pests, particularly possums, rats and stoats. Although we often use ground control methods, the rugged nature of this forested terrain, and the lack of access and track networks, makes ground control methods unfeasible. Aerial 1080 possum control operations have been completed in the operational area five times between 1999 and 2019.

In June 2011, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment strongly endorsed the continued use of 1080 in New Zealand.

Ground control method

Ground control will be undertaken around the Gums loop, Nikau, Tana Umaga and Sledge Tracks (blue area on above map). This is due to the high public use of this area. The following ground control methods will be used:

Brodifacoum bait stations



Bait stations containing the toxin Brodifacoum will be placed in trees out of reach of children and pets throughout the area. Adhere to all precautions on signage.

Trapping

Possum traps will be placed in trees out of site of the public throughout the ground control area. Do not touch or interfere with traps.



DO NOT TOUCH any bait stations or Traps.

Supervise children at all times.

Who will be affected?

Much of the operation falls within a publicly restricted area, so effects will be minimal. Some walking tracks may be closed on the day of bait applications.

The operation will have further effects on certain activities:

People with dogs – Stay clear of the area until all baits have become non-toxic and possum carcasses have decomposed.

Decomposition is climate dependant but is expected to take approximately six months following the 1080 application.

Hunters – There is an annual ballot to undertake hunting within the forest every April. No hunting access is available in the forest at any other time during the year.

Adjoining landowners and graziers – All adjoining landowners will be notified of the operation. Boundary fences need to be secure so that livestock cannot enter the operational area.

KEY INFORMATION

SAFE DRINKING WATER

1080 is an organic, water soluble and biodegradable substance that is readily broken down by bacteria and other micro-organisms in the environment. Local health authorities apply strict conditions to aerial operations so that drinking water supplies are not contaminated. Safety has been confirmed by tests on several thousand water samples taken after aerial 1080 operations over many years.

The proposed operation presents no risk to human or pet health as long as these precautions are followed:

- If entering the operational area, follow the advice on warning signs at all main access points.
- Do not handle any bait or allow children to wander unsupervised in the area.
- Do not bring dogs into the operational area. Dogs are particularly susceptible to 1080. They must not be allowed access to bait or poisoned carcasses, which remain toxic to dogs until they have fully decomposed.
- Treat the area outside the operation boundary with care as well, as possums may consume 1080 baits and die outside of the operational boundary.
- Avoid taking deer for consumption within a two km radius of the operational area and avoid taking pigs for a five km radius, as recommended by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). MPI also advise that hunting should cease in an area for four months following 1080 baiting.

We will be monitoring the breakdown of toxic baits and possum carcasses, and when these have decomposed, the poison warning signs will be officially removed, and the public will be able to resume normal activities in the area.

We'll also put a notice up on our website – www.gw.govt.nz/1080ops when this occurs

Further information

Looking for more information on 1080?

Check out: <https://predatorfreenz.org/toolkits/trapping-baiting-toolkit/bush-large-areas/1080-an-overview/> or scan the QR code below



Wanting an operational update?

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