

6 Objectives and Policies for Managing the District's Landscapes and Indigenous Biodiversity

6.1 Introduction

The South Waikato district has landscapes and indigenous vegetation and habitats of indigenous fauna ('natural areas') that have been identified as being outstanding or significant. Their protection is to be recognised as a matter of national importance in terms of Sections 6b) and 6c) of the RMA. One of Council's functions under Section 31(b)(iii) of the RMA is to control any actual or potential effects of the use, development or protection of land for the purpose of maintaining indigenous biological diversity. The landscapes and natural areas of the district and the value of indigenous biodiversity underpin the local tourism industry, form an important part of the identity and character of the district, and require special approaches to their management.

These landscapes and natural areas are located in rural parts of the district. These rural areas also support the primary production economic base of the district, with farming and production forestry being the predominant rural land uses. Many of the outstanding landscapes and significant natural areas (SNAs) are therefore associated with farming and forestry land uses. The hydro-electric power stations on the Waikato River are another important part of the district's economy. The Waikato River valley is also the location of outstanding landscape areas, very significant cultural landscapes, and significant natural areas.

The district plan seeks to manage this 'working rural environment', whilst also providing protection to the outstanding or significant landscapes and natural areas. Outstanding natural features and landscapes, areas of significant indigenous vegetation, and significant habitats of indigenous fauna, are all recognised in the RMA as 'matters of national importance'. Section 6(c) of the RMA establishes as a 'matter of national importance' the "protection of areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna". In respect of landscape values, section 6(b) provides for the "protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes from inappropriate subdivision, use and development". The "preservation of the natural character" of wetlands, lakes and rivers and their margins (section 6(a)), and promoting public access to lakes and rivers (section 6(d)) are also recognised as matters of national importance.

Section 7 of the RMA identifies several 'other matters' that Council 'shall have particular regard to' and includes section 7(c) 'the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values', section 7(d) 'the intrinsic values of ecosystems', section 7(f) 'maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the environment', and 7(g) 'any finite characteristics of natural and physical resources'. These values of indigenous biodiversity need to be recognised in a broader sense, and management approaches adopted consistent with meeting these obligations under the Act.

Safeguarding the physical and cultural landscapes of the Waikato River and its catchment are essential for the district plan to give effect to the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River, as required under the Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Raukawa and Te Arawa River Iwi Waikato River Act 2010.

The Proposed Waikato Regional Policy Statement ('the RPS') prepared by the Waikato Regional Council also provides specific policy direction on protecting outstanding natural features and landscapes, and significant natural areas. Section 11 'Indigenous Biodiversity' of the RPS outlines a number of implementation methods that the district plan must give effect to. The focus of these provisions is the identification and protection of significant natural areas, and the protection and enhancement of indigenous biodiversity.

Section 12 'Landscape, Natural Character and Amenity' of the RPS similarly contains policies and a series of implementation methods for identifying and protecting landscape values. There is no regionally significant natural feature or landscape identified in the RPS that is located within the district. However, the RPS does encourage district councils to identify outstanding or significant natural features and landscapes at a district level. This identification has been done for the South Waikato District, and is recorded in Appendix C – Schedule of Outstanding Natural Features and Landscapes and in the Natural Values overlay on the planning maps.

6.1.1 Landscape Assessment

A landscape assessment of the South Waikato district has been conducted by Isthmus Group on behalf of Council. The Isthmus report identifies the landscapes and natural features in the district that are 'outstanding' and those that have 'significant amenity' values. The criteria used in Isthmus' assessment are consistent with the criteria set out in Table 12.2 of the Proposed Waikato Regional Policy Statement (Decisions Version). The outstanding natural landscapes (ONLs) that have been identified are the broad scale landscapes in the district considered to have outstanding landscape values at a district or regional level. The outstanding natural features (ONFs) identified are also outstanding at a district level, but involve a smaller geographical area. These are an element or group of landscape elements, rather than an entire landscape. Significant Amenity Landscapes (SALs) are areas whose status is related to Section 7(c) of the Act. These landscape areas have high amenity, however are not outstanding. The criteria used to identify them were the same as used for the ONLs and ONFs.

Landscape values are also linked to the presence of significant areas of indigenous vegetation and habitat within identified landscape areas, given the contribution indigenous vegetation makes to landscape attributes. Some ONL areas within the district do not however have indigenous vegetation cover, but are still outstanding for other reasons such as bold topography or high cultural values.

The particular areas identified as ONLs, ONFs, and SALs are detailed in Appendix C and are displayed on the Natural Values overlay of the planning maps. Specific rules have been formulated to manage land use within these areas to protect landscape attributes.

It is important to realise the cultural dimension of landscapes, and the fact that Tangata Whenua's historical association with places in the district provides a different appreciation of landscape values to that provided by landscape architects. The Waikato River is of course a significant area for Raukawa, but so too are the Mamakus, Te Waihou, Pohaturoa and Tirau, for example.

6.1.2 Indigenous Biodiversity in the South Waikato

Areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats perform vital roles in maintaining the district's biodiversity and therefore warrant responsible management.

Since 1840, the combined effects of logging, land clearance, drainage and fires have reduced indigenous vegetation cover in the district to approximately 11.5%. Once indigenous habitat thresholds fall below 20%, loss of indigenous species (and therefore ecosystem functions and processes) occurs at an exponential rate. The greatest amount of clearance has occurred in the lowland areas. The largest, oldest and best quality indigenous habitats within the South Waikato District occur in the higher parts of the eastern side of the district. In the western part of the district ecological values have been substantially reduced, fragmented and disconnected from those in the east. Management of the rural area including the predominant land uses of plantation forestry and farming can play an important role in maintaining indigenous biodiversity.

These significant natural areas are vulnerable to legal and physical fragmentation, stock browsing, introduced weeds and pest animals, land modification, and vegetation clearance. Adverse effects on indigenous biodiversity include:

- fragmentation and isolation of indigenous ecosystems and habitats
- reduction in the extent of indigenous ecosystems and habitats
- loss of corridors or connections linking indigenous ecosystems and habitat fragments or between ecosystems and habitats (ecological sequences from mountains to sea)
- loss or disruption to migratory pathways in water, land or air
- effects of changes to hydrological flows, water levels, and water quality on ecosystems
- loss of cultural activities associated with biodiversity (eg as a source of food, weaving, medicines or building materials)
- loss of buffering of indigenous ecosystems
- loss of ecosystem services
- Loss, damage or disruption to ecological processes, functions and ecological integrity

- Changes resulting in an increased threat from animal and plant pests.

Long-term protection and sustainable management of indigenous vegetation and habitats requires active management regimes, rather than simply prevention of development in these areas. Re-creation and restoration of habitats historically found in the district is also important in protecting local biodiversity. The district has been highly modified by land clearance in the past, except in eastern parts of the district, and highly modified pastoral and plantation forestry environments are now dominant. For many habitat types in lowland areas, only small remnants remain and these habitat types are under-represented in the network of legally protected areas and the land administered by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Accordingly, they face the greatest threat of further loss. These habitats warrant different management effort than habitat types that make up large areas of the public estate. Indigenous habitats remain vulnerable to land modification, weed invasion, stock browsing, and pest animals.

Large landholdings in the district are owned by several forestry owners with exotic plantation forests being the dominant land use. As at 2013, approximately 50% of the South Waikato District is in plantation forests. Within these plantation forests are a number of significant natural areas, landscapes identified as being outstanding or significant, and sites of significance to tangata whenua. Some of these large forestry landholdings are managed by companies with Forestry Stewardship Council ('FSC') accreditation, which the Council supports as being an audited certification system. FSC requires forests to be managed sustainably and include features on protection of natural, landscape and cultural sites and values. The work of the FSC certified foresters is audited by FSC accredited certification bodies. Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (ENGOS) such as the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society are involved in setting the FSC national standard, and all stakeholders including ENGO's are consulted as part of the audit. This programme provides public accountability that important natural values are well-managed within plantation forests. The forestry industry has made significant efforts to document and retain the SNAs on their land, and the plantation forest in the District is an important habitat for indigenous species including bats (pekapeka) and the NZ falcon (karearea).

The Mamaku Plateau in the east of the district contains large areas of indigenous forest and fauna habitats, much of which is land administered by DOC. Water from the Mamaku Plateau is of high quality, and is the source of a number of natural springs and rivers, including Te Waihou (meaning source of the water or 'new river'), and the Pokaiwhenua and Oraka Streams. Water is an important natural resource and is used by the water bottling plants at Putaruru as a commercial asset. The Blue Spring along Te Waihou River is the source for 70% of New Zealand's bottled water, and is an important economic resource for the district.

The Waikato River valley contains significant historical, cultural, landscape, ecological, and recreational values. It is New Zealand's longest river and delineates much of the southern and western boundaries of the district. The Waikato River is a key defining feature of the district and has five hydro-electric power generating facilities along the section of the river within the South Waikato District. Whilst modified through damming and land use changes along the margins of the river, the Waikato River and other local waterways are an important recreational fishery, with trout (taraute) and eels (tuna) being the most prominent species (although indigenous fish migration is severely limited by the hydro dams).

A close working relationship must be maintained with Raukawa, adjoining territorial authorities, resource users and the Regional Council to address water quality and water management issues that affect the district and to ensure implementation of the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River.

The land administered by DOC contains some of the most significant fauna and flora of the district, including kokako and native bats, and includes many of the outstanding landscapes of the district. The remaining natural areas are located on private land, and are predominantly located in small pockets of indigenous habitat along the margins of streams, lakes and rivers, remnant wetlands, and indigenous forest in farmland and the exotic plantation forests. There are also some larger remaining areas of remnant indigenous shrubland and forest located on private land.

6.1.3 Inventory of Natural Areas

In 2009 the Regional Council undertook a desktop exercise to identify areas of possible indigenous vegetation and habitat within the district that may have qualified as significant in terms of the RPS criteria. These areas were identified at a regional scale using aerial photographs and other information, and so needed to be checked. The necessary "ground-truthing" ecological site assessments were completed by the District Council in 2012, and resulted in the Schedule of Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) listed in Appendix E of the plan. These SNA sites are shown on the Natural Values overlay of the planning maps.

The information collected on the sites in Appendix E, plus the Regional Council data on sites that field checks showed did not meet the RPS criteria, comprises an Inventory of Natural Areas with information on over 400 sites in the district, covering approximately 22,000 hectares of land. The Inventory is held by Council as an information resource available to landowners and the public to promote the protection of significant natural areas and indigenous biodiversity in the district. The inventory will also be used for prioritising Council resources to assist landowners to actively protect and manage these areas.

6.1.4 Consultation

Council recognises the importance of involving the community when developing the District plan approaches for the ongoing active management and any future identification of the areas affected by this chapter (for example, including Significant Natural Areas and Outstanding Landscapes). To achieve this Council will undertake consultation approaches that reflect best practice. This will include: involving potentially directly affected landowners and/or leaseholders early in the development of a project to identify the nature and scope of fieldwork that needs to be undertaken, seeking feedback on the potential impacts the conservation of the area/site might have on landowner and/or leaseholder activities, and discussing with the landowner and/or leaseholder the approaches that could be adopted to promote the long term protection of the area/site.

6.2 Objectives for the District's Landscape and Natural Values

- 6.2.1** To recognise the outstanding natural features and landscapes in the district and protect the landscape values within these areas from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.
- 6.2.2** To safeguard the significant historical, cultural, landscape, ecological, indigenous biodiversity, natural and recreational values of the Waikato River and its margins while enabling existing rural land uses and electricity generating infrastructure and electricity transmission and distribution lines.
- 6.2.3** To safeguard the significant historical, cultural, landscape, natural and recreational values associated with the high quality water resources of Te Waihou River and its tributaries.
- 6.2.4** To preserve the natural character of wetlands, lakes and rivers (and their margins) in the district, and protect them from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.
- 6.2.5** To identify, and maintain or enhance the values of the district's indigenous biodiversity including by protecting areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna.
- 6.2.6** To maintain and enhance public access to lakes and rivers in the district, particularly those locations identified as being of high priority due to their ecological or recreational values, where public access is compatible with protecting ecological values.
- 6.2.7** To maintain and enhance amenity values within outstanding natural landscapes and features, and significant amenity landscapes.
- 6.2.8** To recognise and provide for the relationship Raukawa and the Te Arawa River Iwi as Tangata Whenua have with the Waikato River, sites of significance, taonga, wāhi tapu, and the landscapes of the district.
- 6.2.9** To recognise and promote the intrinsic values of indigenous biodiversity and ecosystems.

6.3 Policies

The objectives will be achieved through the following policies:

- 6.3.1** Identification of outstanding natural features and landscapes, and active management to ensure that the landscape values are recognised and protected from the adverse effects of inappropriate subdivision, use and development.

- 6.3.2** Subdivision, use, and development should avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse effects on the values that contribute to an area being an outstanding natural feature or landscape, in particular by avoiding, remedying or mitigating the adverse effects of activities such as indigenous vegetation clearance, wetland drainage, large-scale landform modification, and construction of large or otherwise visually prominent structures, buildings and earthworks that will adversely affect those values identified.
- 6.3.3** Have regard to the locational and operational requirement of utilities or infrastructure proposed within an outstanding natural feature and landscape in the district.
- 6.3.4** Ensure that regard is had to the local, regional and national benefits (social, economic and environmental) to be derived from the use and development of infrastructure proposed within an outstanding natural feature and landscape in the district.
- 6.3.5** Ensuring that earthworks and buildings within identified significant amenity landscapes are of a compatible scale that maintains the attributes that contribute to the landscape values of these areas.
- 6.3.6** Significant indigenous vegetation and habitats of indigenous fauna in the district are identified in accordance with criteria in section 11A- "Criteria for determining significance of indigenous biodiversity" of the Regional Policy Statement, and protected through avoiding, mitigating or remedying the effects of clearance of significant indigenous vegetation and land modification within such areas.
- 6.3.7** Subdivision, use and development shall avoid the loss or degradation of areas of indigenous vegetation and habitats of indigenous fauna, whether these areas and habitats are significant or not, in preference to remedying or mitigating adverse effects on those areas or habitats.
- 6.3.8** Where it is not practicable or appropriate to avoid significant or more than minor adverse effects of activities on areas of Significant Natural Areas then adverse effects must be remedied or mitigated. Principles of this policy are:
- a) replacing the indigenous biodiversity that has been lost or degraded
 - b) replacing like-for-like habitats or ecosystems (including being of at least equivalent size or ecological value)
 - c) the legal and physical protection of existing habitat, or
 - d) the creation of new habitat.
- 6.3.9** The effects on the cultural and spiritual relationships of Raukawa and the Te Arawa River Iwi as Tangata Whenua with the outstanding natural features and landscapes identified, and with significant indigenous vegetation and habitats in the district, shall be recognised and provided for in considering resource consent applications for subdivision, use, and development, including involving Tangata Whenua when identifying opportunities for re-creating habitat and implementing the local indigenous biodiversity strategy.
- 6.3.10** Subdivision, use and development should be of a density, scale, intensity and in a location that preserves the natural character of wetlands, lakes and rivers and their margins, protects significant natural areas and maintains indigenous biodiversity in the district. In particular, consideration should be given to existing indigenous vegetation and habitat values, the restoration potential of an area, the ecological linkages with other significant natural areas and their potential for enhancement.
- 6.3.11** Subdivision incentives are encouraged where the use of covenants by landowners provides statutory protection for land containing significant indigenous vegetation and habitats.

- 6.3.12** Subdivision that results in the legal fragmentation of indigenous vegetation including Significant Natural Areas should be avoided, as it can affect the ability to actively and comprehensively manage these areas.
- 6.3.13** Landowners will be encouraged to manage indigenous biodiversity including Significant Natural Areas in a manner that protects and potentially enhances long-term ecological functioning and wetland hydrology.
- 6.3.14** Esplanade reserves and esplanade strips shall be created in identified high priority locations, to provide ecological linkages, improve water quality and enhance public access to lakes and rivers and their margins within the district.
- 6.3.15** Enable the Department of Conservation to manage public conservation lands under the Conservation Act 1987, without a duplicated regime of district plan provisions applying to those areas.
- 6.3.16** To implement the Objectives of the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River by managing subdivision and land use within areas with natural values and located within the River catchment in a way that restores and protects the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River, including by;
 - a) identifying the Waikato River as an Outstanding Natural Landscape
 - b) protecting Significant Natural Areas and indigenous vegetation
 - c) requiring building setbacks from waterways
 - d) including standards for earthworks, riparian management, silt and stormwater control
 - e) creating esplanade reserves or strips
 - f) managing activities within natural areas
 - g) protection lot subdivision provisions for Significant Natural Areas
 - h) Promoting the restoration and re-creation of habitats and connectivity between habitats, including buffering and linking areas identified as SNAs

6.4 Methods to Achieve Objectives and Policies

The objectives and policies contained in 6.2 and 6.3 will be implemented through the following methods:

6.4.1 District Plan Methods

- Identification of outstanding natural landscapes and outstanding natural features within the Natural Values overlay on the planning maps
- Identification of significant amenity landscapes within the Natural Values overlay on the planning maps
- Identification of significant natural areas within the Natural Values overlay on the planning maps
- Rules 14.3.1 and 14.3.2 to control the scale of buildings, and land modification within Outstanding Natural Landscapes and Features, and Significant Amenity Landscapes
- Rule 14.4 to control indigenous vegetation, land disturbance and land drainage within significant natural areas identified in Appendix E
- The Conservation Area overlay within the Rural Zone to identify the land administered by the Department of Conservation
- Rules in Chapter 28 Rural Zone and Chapter 29 Rural Residential Zone, to control the proximity of buildings to water bodies
- Rules in Chapter 29 Rural Residential Zone that require buildings close to the Waikato River to be designed in sympathy with the significant landscape attributes of the areas concerned

- Subdivision provisions relating to the Rural and Rural Residential Zones that prevent any new boundaries being created within or adjacent to significant natural areas, unless those areas are covenanted to protect and enhance the natural values present. The subdivision provisions also establish incentives to enable the protection of significant natural areas by covenanting through “protection lot” provisions
- Consent notices imposed upon new land titles as a condition of subdivision consent, requiring protection of SNAs and/or appropriate riparian management
- Identification of items of built heritage within significant amenity landscapes (e.g. the Okoroire hot springs hotel) in the Heritage Inventory to recognise and protect the heritage, natural and landscape attributes of these sites
- Provisions requiring the creation of esplanade strips and reserves adjacent to lakes and rivers identified as being ‘high priority’ areas for water quality, natural character and ecological protection, and to provide public access, in Chapter 10 Subdivision
- Rules to manage the use of the surface of the water contained within Chapter 16 Activities on the Surface of the Water
- Rules within Chapter 30 Electricity Generation Zone to manage activities related to the existing hydro-electric power stations on the Waikato River
- Assessment criteria listed in Chapter 8 Administration of the Plan to enable consideration of the potential impacts on areas identified in the Inventory of Natural Areas when resource consent applications are being assessed and consent conditions formulated.

6.4.2 Other Methods

- Develop a District or Local Biodiversity Strategy in collaboration with Iwi, the Regional Council, Department of Conservation, landowners and special interest groups such as Federated Farmers, the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society and the Waikato Biodiversity Forum, to identify areas of significant natural conservation value and the options for their protection, in order to maintain or enhance local indigenous biodiversity. A summary of the content and timing for undertaking the strategy is outlined in Chapter 14, Section 14.1.2.
- Maintain an Inventory of Natural Areas as an information resource detailing the location, extent and significance of indigenous vegetation and habitats, and a description of the features present at the identified sites. This Inventory will be used for Land Information Memorandums where a natural area is identified
- Management programmes will be developed in conjunction with landowners for natural areas identified in the District or Local Biodiversity Strategy initially focusing on the most significant sites in the district. Council will provide an advisory service to assist landowners to manage and enhance natural areas on their land, with a focus on improving ecological linkages between areas, undertaking weed and pest control, replanting with indigenous vegetation, and fencing of natural areas to exclude stock
- Grants to landowners implementing the management programmes described above, such as fencing of natural and riparian areas to exclude stock and replanting to improve indigenous biodiversity
- Funding and support for Waikato Biodiversity Forum initiatives encouraging agencies and groups to network, share ideas and work together to protect and enhance biodiversity
- Grants will also be available to community conservation groups such as land care groups, stream care groups, and other community environmental groups, through contestable funds at national, regional and local levels
- Negotiation of access strip agreements to provide public access to lake and river margins in a priority case where a subdivision is not proposed
- Council will promote the use of Queen Elizabeth II National Trust covenants, Nga Whenua Rahui Kawenata, and other private covenants by landowners as a means to protect significant natural areas within privately-owned land in the district

- Council will collaborate with the Department of Conservation to protect and enhance the indigenous biodiversity and landscape values located within the conservation estate, pursuant to statutory protection under the Conservation Act 1987
- Development of a Cultural Landscape Plan in conjunction with Raukawa, including consideration of a cultural landscape protection plans for the Waikato River Valley and for the hills north of Tīrau, in consultation with affected landowners
- The development of a Te Waihou /Blue Spring Co-Management Plan involving Raukawa, the Regional Council, and the Department of Conservation
- A monitoring programme for biodiversity and ecological health and wellbeing of the Waikato River and the district as a whole, including mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) as a key aspect
- Collaboration with the Regional Council and the Waikato River Authority in developing targets and programmes for improving the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River
- Council administered land (particularly riparian margins and areas of remnant indigenous vegetation) will be managed to enhance indigenous biodiversity values through restoration planting programmes, pest control, minimising land disturbance and indigenous vegetation clearance.
- Acknowledge the rate of uptake amongst the district's forest operators of independently-audited "best practice" programmes such as certification under either Forest Stewardship Council, or Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification to inform the Local Biodiversity Strategy.

6.5 Reasons

6.5.1 Protection of Landscape Values

Rules are included within Chapter 14 to manage activities and land uses that may adversely affect the landscape attributes within these landscape areas and features.

Some regulatory methods are considered necessary to protect outstanding natural features and landscapes, and significant amenity landscapes. Council has sought to apply a set of rules that enable development and land use change to occur, but in a manner that protects the identified landscape values of particular areas. In this context, protection does not mean that no development or land use change will occur, but rather those particular activities such as clearance of vegetation, modification of the landform, and the scale of buildings and structures, that are likely to detrimentally affect landscape attributes need to be managed.

6.5.2 Protection of Natural Areas

The primary threats to the natural areas in the district are considered to be neglect (i.e. an absence of active management including pest control), cumulative effects such as intensive development in close proximity to waterways, stock access, clearance of indigenous vegetation (which can occur incrementally), and extensive land modification. The focus is therefore to identify the significant natural areas in the district, formulate management programmes, and collaborate with landowners and stakeholders to implement those management programmes.

A framework of rules in Chapter 14 that focuses on indigenous vegetation clearance, land disturbance and land drainage has been formulated to address these aspects. The plan provisions have sought to recognise that many of the significant natural areas identified are within 'working environments' such as exotic plantation forests and farms, and along the margins of lakes and rivers associated with hydro-electric power stations.

Information on the location, size and values of the district's significant natural areas is held within the Inventory of Natural Areas. This data will be updated over time as specific information is collected in connection with individual resource consent applications. Typically, the sites identified are wetlands, river or stream margins, areas of remnant indigenous forest, or smaller indigenous forest fragments.

For a significant natural area to remain ecologically viable in the long term, 'buy-in' from landowners is crucial, requiring active management of weeds and pests, fencing to prevent stock entry, and replanting to enhance the vegetative cover and provide shelter along the edges of remnants. Enhancing connections between remnants to

provide the necessary ecological corridors is also essential for their long-term viability. District plan rules and scheduling of all significant natural areas, are unlikely on their own to achieve the level of landowner 'buy in' required to achieve positive results in maintaining and enhancing the district's natural values.

Much of the biodiversity and landscape protection being undertaken in the district is within conservation land administered by DOC under the Conservation Act 1987. DOC manages the activities of other parties through their concessions process. Accordingly, the district plan provisions relating to this land do not seek to overlap or duplicate the Conservation Act provisions. The land administered by DOC is within the Rural Zone with an overlay shown on the planning maps to demarcate it, and specific provisions drafted to manage these areas. Forest owners and managers such as Hancock Forest Management Ltd also have a significant role to play.

Achieving conservation objectives over the long-term also depends on establishing and maintaining effective partnerships. Council will partner with Raukawa, the Regional Council, DOC, Fish and Game NZ, Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, Queen Elizabeth II National Trust, local environmental groups such as Landcare and Streamcare groups, and landowners. Indigenous biodiversity enhancement programmes will be undertaken with funding provided by the Council and the WRC, and supplemented with corporate funding as available. Council will also provide support services to local environmental and community groups to increase their effectiveness. Public education, advocacy and provision of management programmes for individual significant natural areas are important to the success of these programmes.

6.5.3 Preservation of Natural Character and Public Access

The preservation of the natural character of wetlands, lakes and rivers and their margins, and the protection of them from inappropriate subdivision, use and development is a matter of national importance under the Act. Preservation of the natural character of these areas and their protection is also necessary in order to give effect to the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River. So is the maintenance and enhancement of public access to and along lakes and rivers. Rules to control the extent of earthworks and land modification close to wetlands and watercourses, are included within the Rural Zone and the Rural Residential Zone, along with specific building setbacks from watercourses to manage these activities. Whilst these rules apply to all of the Rural Zone and the Rural Residential Zone, the Inventory of Natural Areas held outside the district plan will enable Council and the community to strategically manage these areas, given that they have the most significant natural values in the district.

The district plan has also identified the land parcels around water bodies that are considered to be a high priority for creation of esplanade strips or esplanade reserves to enhance conservation values and/or public access. Many of the significant natural areas identified in the district are related to waterbodies, wetlands and riparian vegetation. Council will link the natural habitat corridors where possible through esplanade strips and reserves, and covenanting private land during the subdivision process.

Subdivision provisions within the Rural Zone and Rural Residential Zone also incentivise the covenanting of significant natural areas by providing for protection allotments to be created. These provisions seek to enable a landowner to subdivide a property, whilst also creating a statutory protection mechanism for protection of significant natural areas. Economic instruments, including subdivision incentives, are considered an effective way of encouraging landowners to retain and enhance significant habitats.

Council also has a leadership role by protecting outstanding or significant amenity landscapes and natural features, and avoiding adverse effects on significant natural areas, through land disturbance activities on land administered by Council.