



TE KAWERAU IWI
TIAKI TRUST

PROPOSAL: HEART OF THE NGAHERE SANCTUARY

THE PROBLEM

The Waitākere Ranges are a national treasure. Consisting of 27,700ha of dramatic landscapes, 25% of Auckland's drinking water, a thousand rare and threatened species, and one of the last remnants of kauri rainforest (less than 4% remains of the original coverage of kauri forest nationally) that act as the lungs of the city, the area is a bulwark against biodiversity loss and climate change. These outstanding natural values provide the bedrock of human wellbeing, and a home for Te Kawerau ā Maki and distinct local communities around the forest fringes. Unfortunately, not many people are aware of the extent of the significance of the area, that there is a legal requirement to enhance it, or that it must be managed in an integrated way.

The legislation that established the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area remains poorly implemented. Most Crown agencies don't even know it exists. Investment in the area by central government over the past decade has been essentially \$0, while historically (pre-rāhui) Council's investment has fallen so low even basic track maintenance could not be done. Roughly 1,000,000 people visit the area each year, including over 200,000 visitors to the most popular tracks such as Kitekite Falls – 20 times the number that walk the Milford Track. As the population grows so too will the visitor numbers and there is simply no turning the tap of demand off. The rare ecology of the area is threatened with extinction by pests, weeds, climate change and disease including kauri dieback. Despite some passionate community initiatives, coordination of agencies and groups across the area towards a collective and integrated goal is desperately needed. Decision-making is made too often on an ad-hoc and knee-jerk basis where short-termism rules supreme. Some of the public perception and the management of the area can't see the forest for the trees.

What all this means is that there is no long-term vision or plan of how to holistically manage and actually enhance the area. Enhancement of nature is necessarily an inter-generational exercise. Every 5 years a monitoring report is prepared on how the legislation is being implemented, and every 5 years Te Kawerau ā Maki requests a Waitākere Ranges forum be established, a strategic plan be prepared, and proper investment be made.

The lack of action and threat of extinction led Te Kawerau ā Maki to declare a rāhui over the forest in 2017 – essentially placing the ecosystem on life support while proper work is done to protect it from the spread of kauri dieback and inadequate infrastructure. Like *phytophthora* around the world from sudden oak death in the US to banksia and jarrah dieback in Australia, human-mediated movement is the main cause of spread. The severity of dieback is influenced by the 'disease triangle' – the interaction of the health of the host, the presence of the disease, and the conditions of the wider environment. The rāhui, combined with infrastructure upgrades and better catchment management, has meant that the interior of the forest has remained largely free of kauri dieback disease: 10% of kauri tested positive for *P. agathidicida* and these are contained to the edges of the forest, and 16.5% of kauri being symptomatic following a largely similar distribution (refer to 2021 Waitākere Ranges survey report). The pathogen is naturally slow-moving and consistent with introduction from the edges of the forest. This 'edge-effect' is where the forest is most exposed, where historic disturbance happened, where people live and recreate, and where pests and weeds invade.

A SOLUTION

The Waitākere Ranges requires enhancement and strategic integrated management befitting its national significance. This is not merely a legal requirement but a moral need if we are to ensure inter-generational wellbeing and prevent extinctions. Enhancement of nature necessitates long-term planning and efforts: if we want a kauri seed to grow into a forest giant we need to try and



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align our planning horizons to the lifecycle of the oldest residents of the forest. We also need to empower national significance to be managed more locally by the people who love it most.

Te Kawerau ā Maki placed a rāhui over the forest to protect and enhance its mauri or life force. While we have succeeded, with the help of Council and community, in slowing the spread of the disease, the foundational natural values of the area still require enhancement, and the edges of the forest are likely to be forever compromised to some degree. People also desire clarity and certainty of a plan that looks after nature while providing for social wellbeing including recreation – another important value protected in the legislation.

We set out to protect the heart of the forest and we have ‘held the line’ to date. While this is an existential issue for our iwi, the challenges, and their solutions, are not about ‘Māori privilege’ (as some have claimed) but about how we collectively look after and improve our environment now so it is there for our great-grandchildren. Population pressure keeps growing, climate change is happening, and more invasive pests and diseases are likely on their way. To solve the long-term enhancement objectives of the area there is a need to establish a pest-free sanctuary within the heart of the ngahere.

We want to see existing old growth kauri and other co-dependant trees and species protected, to know we have given the best chance for a seedling to grow into a giant, to see tuatara and kiwi return to the land, and to have birdsong overwhelm the senses. A pest-free sanctuary at the heart of the forest would provide a reservoir of life and mauri that support biodiversity, a stable climate, and water security – if the heart thrives it will enable biodiversity to ‘spill-over’ into the more compromised edges of the forest.

The ‘heart of the ngahere’ sanctuary (that would also function as a kauri protection area under the NPMP-Pa) is proposed to be a landscape-level 6,145ha area in the uninhabited centre of the Waitākere Ranges. The area included is based on the below rationale and boundaries as shown in figure 1:

- (a) Avoids areas of significant human settlement and activity.
- (b) Includes only the uninhabited public land within the centre of the forest representing only 35% of the total area of the Regional Park (22% of the total area of the WRHA), in line with UN biodiversity protection goals of 1/3rd of areas having high protection.
- (c) Is of a landscape scale necessary for habitat enhancement and function in the long-term.
- (d) Largely protects the main area of the forest where there has been no significant/widespread evidence of kauri dieback based on the results of the 2021 survey (10% population is impacted by *P. agathidicida* but clustered around the edges of the forest).
- (e) Avoids the fringes of the forest where high-demand for recreational access is focused.
- (f) Avoids the fringes of the forest where most past adverse impacts occurred and where future impacts are most likely to occur including pest incursion, human recreation and development, and the introduction of new or spread of existing pathogens (edge-effects).
- (g) Covers an area similar to the water catchment area that existed until 1992 as a prohibited area.
- (h) Includes upland old growth and regenerating forest.
- (i) Does not preclude or impact on the balance of the WRHA offering a wide variety of recreational options including multi-day walks, day walks, 3-hour loops, short-loops, forest walks, and dam walks – our proposal includes opening new loop tracks as well as a new multi-day Waitākere Ranges circumference hike across regional and local tracks and greenways.
- (j) Have a minimal impact on the existing track offering – it would remove 19 tracks (3 partially and 16 fully) of the 136 tracks or 14% of the total (this figure does not include the many local park tracks within the boundaries of the WRHA)
- (k) Is largely catchment-based using natural boundaries such as ridgelines and waterways.
- (l) Is a defensible area for intensive pest-control



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- (m) Would bring recreation management in line with national and international standards (i.e. km of track per ha, conservation-focused recreation rather than purely recreation-driven decision-making).
- (n) Would give effect to wide range of legislation and policy.
- (o) Pest control, critical infrastructure, and research that relates to enhancing the mauri of the forest, or provision of water, power and communications to communities would continue to operate within the sanctuary.



Figure 1: Proposed Heart of the Ngahere Sanctuary



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There is no feasible alternative option to ensuring inter-generational enhancement of this national treasure. While we understand recreation is an emotive issue for many New Zealanders (including ourselves), and tramping in the wilderness part of our cultural DNA, it is important to keep in perspective the facts and trade-offs here:

Tracks:

	km of Track	Density of Track (m/ha)	Tracks permanently closed by sanctuary	1-3 Hour Loops	Half-Day Loops	Day-Loop	Multi-Day	Forested Walks
Current (Open)	45km	2.6m						
Current (Planned to open soon)	95km	5.5m						
Proposed	151km	8.7m	19 (14%)	23	6	5	1	55
Comparisons:								
Belmont, Battle Hill, Kaitoke and Akatarawa Regional Parks in Wellington	142km	6.4m						
Kaimai Ranges Regional Park	300km	8.1m						
Abel Tasman National Park	120km	5m						
Upper Mountain Area (busiest part) of the Blue Mountains National Park	200km	1m						
Yellowstone National Park	1800km	2m						

Kauri Dieback:

Estimate of >15m tall kauri population within WRHA	>15m tall kauri population within Regional Park	Kauri population with confirmed kauri dieback (PA)	Distribution of dieback
~100,000	68,420	10%	Clustered around edges

Legal and Policy:

Act or Policy	Provision	Alignment (RAG)
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	Article II (protection of taonga)	
UN Convention on Biological Diversity	General	
Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area Act 2008 (note only 3 of the 12 objectives are not included – these relate to subdivision and rural character)	Part 3 - Protection and enhancement for present and future generations	
	Part 8(a) - Protect, restore, and enhance the area and its heritage features	
	Part 8(b) - Cumulative impacts are managed	
	Part 8(c) - Protection of features against significant impacts (precautionary approach)	
	Part 8(d) - Avoidance of adverse impacts on environment	
	Part 8(g) - Protection of landscapes (including degraded ecology)	
	Part 8(h) - Protection and enhancement of ecosystems	
	Part 8(i) - Enable local community wellbeing (through ensuring wide range of high-quality access in balance of area)	
	Part 8(k) - Protection of fresh water	
	Part 8(l) - (l) Protection in perpetuity	



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Conservation Act 1987 and Reserve Act 1977	Section 4 – Give effect to Te Tiriti as applies to Conservation and Reserve Act land	
Biosecurity Act 1993	Section 131 – Controlled Area Notice (in place to manage the movement of contaminated soil in and out of the area)	
Biosecurity (National PA Pest Management Plan) Order 2022	<u>Whole plan</u> but special emphasis on Section 9(2) – Kauri Protection Area	
	Section 9(2) – Kauri Protection Area: (a) that is in a kauri forest; and (b) that meets 1 or more of the following criteria: (i) it contains kauri or forests that have significance to Māori and have cultural value in association with historic events, occupation, and cultural activities: (ii) it contains kauri with important genetic variability: (iii) the kauri in the area contribute to the diversity, distribution, and abundance of animal and plant species or have other significant ecological value to that area such as being old growth or having the ability to naturally regenerate: (iv) it contains iconic kauri or stands of kauri	
National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023	Section 1.5 – Decision-making (prioritization of mauri of indigenous biodiversity)	
	Policy 1 - Indigenous biodiversity is managed in a way that gives effect to the decision-making principles and takes into account the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi	
	Policy 2 - Tangata whenua exercise kaitiakitanga for indigenous biodiversity in their rohe, including through: (a) managing indigenous biodiversity on their land; and (b) identifying and protecting indigenous species, populations and ecosystems that are taonga; and (c) actively participating in other decision-making about indigenous biodiversity	
	Policy 3 - A precautionary approach is adopted when considering adverse effects on indigenous biodiversity	
	Policy 4 - Indigenous biodiversity is managed to promote resilience to the effects of climate change	
	Policy 5 - Indigenous biodiversity is managed in an integrated way, within and across administrative boundaries	
	Policy 13 - Restoration of indigenous biodiversity is promoted and provided for	
Auckland Regional Pest Management Plan	Section 4.2.6 – Waitākere Ranges (including s4.2.7 – kauri dieback)	
Waitākere Ranges Regional Park Management Plan 2022	Section 1 – Park Vision (lost species reintroduced and the heart of the ngahere protected)	
	Section 7 – Management Intentions (work with Te Kawerau ā Maki to give effect to WRHAA and WRPMP)	
Pest Free 2050	Vision and strategies	

While a small minority of special-interest groups in the community wish for a return to the ‘golden age’ of unpopulated and unmanaged recreation of the 1950s, and offer essentially no constructive solutions to the challenges facing the area and the how to go about enhancing its natural values, the world has moved on. Te Kawerau ā Maki honour our past but do not wallow in it. We look to the future. To the many generations yet to come. As kaitiaki we are duty-bound not to simply bury our heads in the sand, or to resent changes needed to provide for other Aucklanders and New



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Zealanders to enjoy this national treasure without killing it. Everyone loves the Waitākere Ranges, but unless we are careful and considerate, we will love it to death. Te Kawerau must act as is our duty, and we urge the wider community and Crown agencies to do the same and to support this kaupapa of enhancement. Big challenges require bold solutions, and we need to work together for the benefit of the environment and for all our people.

KEY ACTIONS

- 1** Establish a Pest-Free Heart of the Ngahere Sanctuary as described above
- 2** Progress the Deed of Acknowledgement provided for in the WRHAA 2008
- 3** Establish a WRHA Forum to drive advocacy, coordination, investment and strategy with a focus on giving effect to the national significance but with local decision-making
- 4** Develop a WRHA Plan to lay out how to give effect to the WRHAA 2008 in an integrated manner