

Te Aroturukitanga o te
Mahere ā-Wae ki Tāmaki Makaurau

Auckland Unitary Plan Section 35 Monitoring

B4.4 Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area (WRHA)

Summary Report
February 2024



Overview

The Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area (WRHA) spans approximately 27,700ha of public and private land.

The Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area Act 2008 (the Act) recognises the national, regional, and local significance of the Waitākere Ranges, and promotes the protection and enhancement of the heritage features for present and future generations.

Chapter B4.4 of the Auckland Unitary Plan Regional Policy Statement (RPS) stems from the purpose of the Act and provides a framework for sustainable management of natural and historic heritage features in the ranges.





B4.4.1. Objective (1) states that the natural and historic resources, including the significant environmental values and heritage features of the Waitākere Ranges, are protected, restored, and enhanced for the benefit, use and enjoyment of the community.

The heritage features of the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area include:

- ecosystems
- landscapes and landforms
- the subservience of the built environment to the area’s natural and rural landscape
- the past and present human culture of the heritage area
- opportunities for wilderness experiences and recreation
- the regional park
- the water catchment and supply system.

The RPS and the Auckland Unitary Plan (AUP) provide for the protection, restoration, and enhancement of these heritage features and enable living, working, and recreating in the WRHA. Development that integrates the distinct communities of the WRHA and contributes to indigenous biodiversity is enabled. The RPS is especially concerned with managing the cumulative effects of growth on the heritage features that can result from intensification in the WRHA.

Eight indicators were developed to assess the progress toward achieving the objectives and outcomes intended by the RPS. These indicators were analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods. This monitoring work contributes to our knowledge base and will help to inform future plan changes. It is recommended that this summary report is read in conjunction with its companion technical topic report.

The AUP zoning in the WRHA can be seen in Figure 1 below.

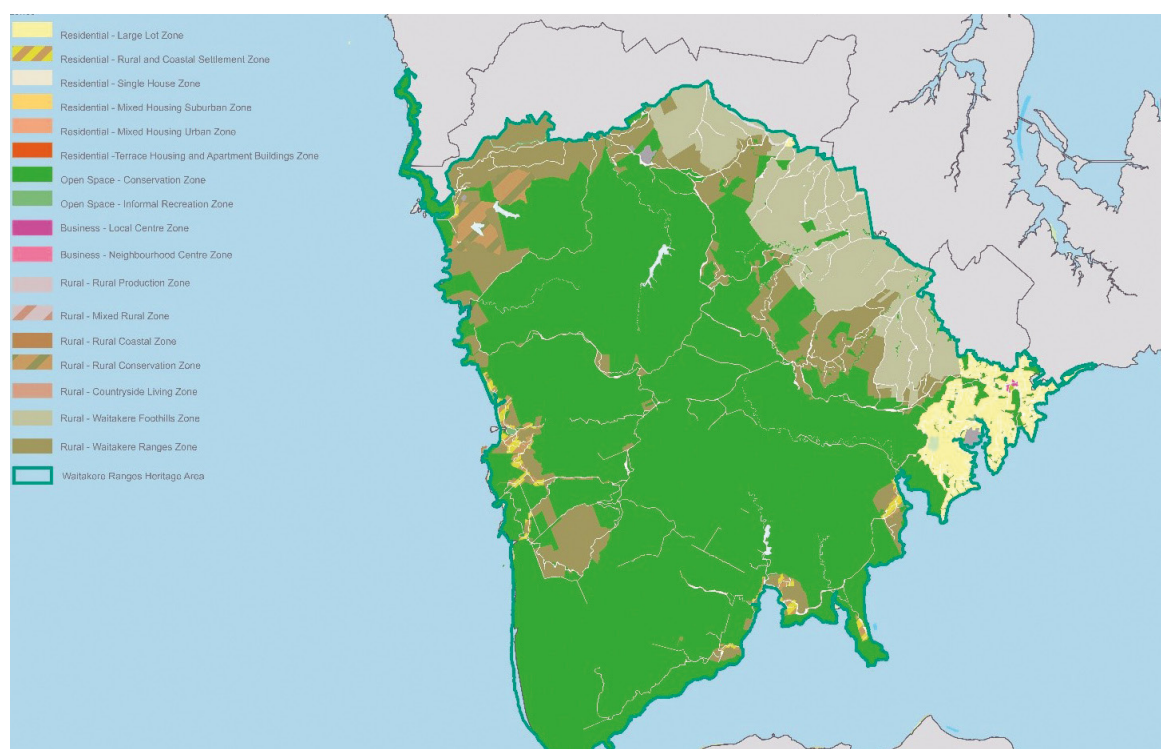


Figure 1 AUP zoning within the WRHA.

Indicator 1

A range of activities are enabled in order for people to work, live, and recreate within the heritage area.

What the indicator can tell us

The RPS seeks to enable the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of local communities in the WRHA. This indicator is a broad assessment of the success of the AUP in enabling a high quality of experience for those who live, work, and visit the WRHA. Protection, restoration, and enhancement of heritage features contributes to the WRHA, and this requires limitations on the proliferation of subdivision, use, and development.

Findings

- A hierarchy of local and neighbourhood centres serve as community focal points, with their size and intensity reflecting the character of the surrounding settlements. As the largest centre in the heritage area, Titirangi shows growth in arts, services, and commerce. The AUP prioritises social, economic, and cultural wellbeing while protecting and enhancing heritage features. This approach leads to limited growth and development, maintaining the area's amenity and unique character in Auckland.
- The WRHA's settlements are primarily residential, limiting job types and job availability in the area. Many residents commute to urban Auckland for jobs, education, and day-to-day activities. Despite a slightly higher unemployment rate, possibly due to an older population, the heritage area exhibits above-average income, high home ownership rates, and significant Gross Domestic Product growth. Employment is distributed between trades and professional services, with a notable presence of home-based occupations. Economic resilience is evident, as seen during the COVID pandemic.
- Community groups in the WRHA are actively engaged in environmental, service, and arts initiatives, underpinned by the principles of Kaitiakitanga (guardianship) and stewardship. Local culture is celebrated through connections to heritage, whakapapa (Māori and European genealogy), and historical landmarks. Community organisations demonstrate a wealth of knowledge in protecting landscapes, historic character, and the environment.
- Visitor numbers are increasing in the WRHA, with recreational spaces being popular for leisure activities and sports. Dry track construction addresses the ecological concerns of Kauri Dieback disease, highlighting the balance between the WRHA as a public place and as a wilderness area. The closure of tracks in response to concerns about the spread of kauri dieback illustrates a commitment to protecting natural heritage, despite the challenges it presents for public access and recreation. Infrastructure and access limitations in the WRHA may struggle under increasing visitor numbers, necessitating planning and asset based / operational solutions to balance heritage and conservation with growing interest in using the area.

Indicator 2

The limited capacity of the heritage area to provide for growth is recognised.

What the indicator can tell us

Cumulative growth effects (such as increased traffic and infrastructure provision) can have an irreversible effect on the heritage features of the WRHA. The RPS aims to avoid placing a maximum threshold on development in the WRHA. Through its policies, the RPS aims to protect natural, social, and community features which are reliant on the retention of natural and rural qualities. Therefore, the standards applied through the AUP zoning and overlays within the WRHA allow for a more rigorous assessment of effects in the resource consent application process than what is common in similar applications located in other rural areas and urban Auckland.

Findings

- Five hundred and fifty-nine land use consents have been granted in the WRHA during the monitoring period and four have been declined. There has been a decrease in resource consent activity during the current monitoring period when compared to earlier years and that aligns with a decrease in resource consent and building consents throughout the monitoring period. This reduction is in line with the approach to limiting growth in the WRHA.
- The AUP is effective in managing growth without imposing overly complicated or restrictive consent conditions. This is evidenced by a lower rate of lapsed, closed, or withdrawn resource consents. The AUP is successfully directing development into areas with existing capacity, such as dwellings being built on vacant lots, and areas of lower ecological value.
- Titirangi and the villages at Ōrātia and Piha are experiencing the most development activity (Figure 2 below). This concentration of development highlights the potential effects on the character and environment of these areas. The AUP aims to manage this by keeping growth potential largely static, with an emphasis on utilising existing capacity.

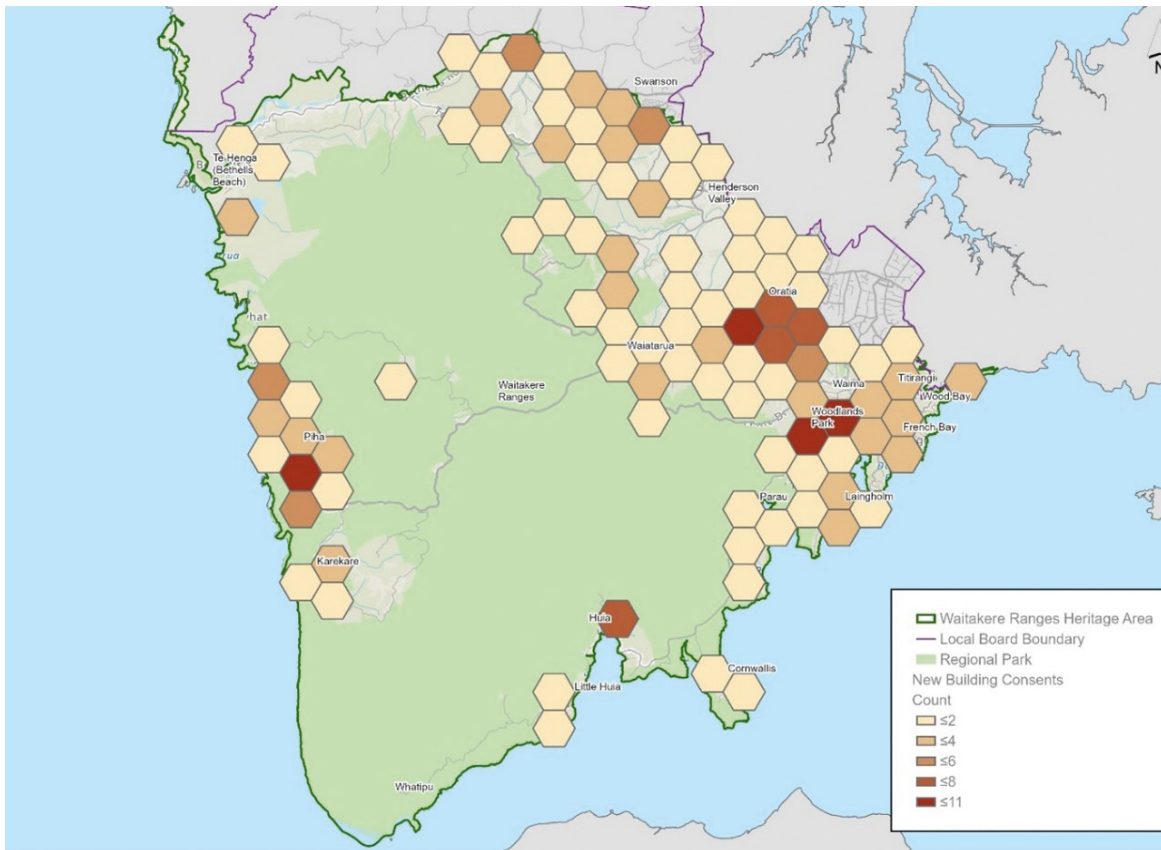


Figure 2 Density of building consents in the WRHA during the monitoring period.

Indicator 3

Subdivision in the heritage area is of an appropriate scale and intensity and complements the character and landscape of the heritage area.

What the indicator can tell us

The RPS sets out that the character, scale, and intensity of subdivision can lead to growth and that there are numerous and sometimes irreversible effects that such developments can pose to heritage features. The AUP does not provide an upper limit on the number of subdivisions which may take place in the WRHA but does manage demand for growth through spatial standards that apply to new lots that are created. Subdivision Schedules in Chapter D12 Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area Overlay are the primary means through which site-specific subdivision opportunities are allocated and standards that manage the effects of subdivision applied in the WRHA. These schedules direct subdivision into areas of the WRHA with the capacity to absorb additional growth and prescribe geographic-specific standards for development.

Findings

- Nineteen consents for fee simple subdivision were approved during the monitoring period, which is a reduction when compared to previous years. These 19 consents created 99 new fee simple lots, a greater average number of lots per consent than occurred in previous years, in part due to a unique subdivision development along Christian Road in Swanson, which contained 48 new lots. The number of subdivision consents and rate of new lots consented can be seen in Table 1. The activity statuses of subdivision consents do not indicate that consents creating a greater number of additional lots are exceeding AUP standards at a higher rate. The greatest concentration of resource consents was located in the suburb of Ōrātia.
- The Chapter D12 Subdivision Schedules are considered to be effective and efficient in directing subdivision to where there is the capacity for growth and identifying opportunities for natural heritage enhancement. 84 per cent of consents for fee simple subdivision during the monitoring period were located within the D12 Subdivision Schedules. Of these, 63 per cent complied with all the standards of the schedule. The most common standard exceeded was vegetation enhancement areas not aligning with the requirements of the Subdivision Schedules. Subdivision activity has also led to the creation of esplanade reserves, ecological enhancement, and environmental protection on newly subdivided sites.

- The average lot size within the D12 Schedules, at 1.28ha, is smaller than the minimum lot sizes elsewhere in the WRHA, yet this is significantly larger than the lot sizes created inside the Rural Urban Boundary. This indicates the AUP’s effectiveness in preserving rural character through controlling subdivision sizes. Outside the D12 Schedules, the average lot size is larger (3.82ha), further emphasising rural character retention.

Table 1 Subdivision activity in the WRHA over current and previous State of the Environment Report monitoring periods.

	Applications for fee simple subdivision	Number of additional fee simple lots consented	Average number of additional fee simple lots consented per subdivision (rounded to tenths)	Number of boundary adjustments
April 2004 – March 2008	75	164	2.2	47
April 2008 – March 2012	41	108	2.6	20
April 2012 – June 2017	30	62	2.1	25
January 2016 – June 2021	19	99	5.2	16

Source: (Auckland Council, 2023).

Indicator 4

The quality and diversity of landscapes in the heritage area identified as having local, regional, or national significance are maintained.



Karekare looking towards Watchman Rock. Ridgelines, landforms, and landscape are recognised and protected for their local, regional, and national significance.

What the indicator can tell us

The RPS recognises that the diversity and quality of the landscapes and landforms in the WRHA are of local, regional, and national significance and should be protected. Due to the varied and extreme topography in the WRHA, the visual effects of development on the landscape can be pronounced and disruptive of the natural backdrop, if not managed appropriately.

The effect of development on significant landscapes and landforms is analysed through quantitative consenting data. That data assessed activities where they do not meet the requirements of AUP overlays that manage development in landscapes of significance. This is augmented by qualitative observation through a landscape assessment completed in 2023.

Findings

- The AUP has been effective in protecting landforms and landscapes of significance in the WRHA. Development within overlays that recognise landscapes and landforms of significance is low compared to total resource consents granted, especially given the spatial extent of the overlays in the WRHA, and only a few new developments were identifiable through visual landscape assessment. Of the 161 consents issued for sites located within overlays recognising landscapes of significance, only 31 triggered an activity associated with the overlay. Where an activity is not provided for by the overlay, discretion is given to consent staff to assess the potential for effects on heritage features.
- Comparisons of photographic “wide shots” taken in 2018 and 2022 show that the overlays effectively minimize or nullify the visual effects of development, thereby contributing to the preservation of the landscape’s integrity. The AUP is successfully avoiding the cumulative effects of development in landscapes of significance. In cases where new development is visible, conditions applied to granted resource consents seek to integrate built and natural forms effectively.
- The Outstanding Natural Features and Outstanding Natural Landscapes overlays in AUP Chapter D10, High Natural Character and Outstanding Natural Character overlays in AUP Chapter D11, and Ridgeline Protection Overlay (RPO) in AUP Chapter D15 provide tailored responses to various landform and landscape types. This recognises different scales and levels of significance, especially in the interface between coastal and terrestrial environments. In areas where overlays intersect, a high-quality integrated response is essential to achieve resource consent approval. The relationship between the activity tables in D10 and D11 ensures a consistent application of assessment criteria for resource consent applications that involve D10 and D11 activities.
- The D15 RPO protects prominent ridgelines that contribute to the diverse character and amenity of the region, including the WRHA. Many ridgelines in the WRHA have roads constructed along them, so development along the ridgeline is expected, especially where development is already prevalent. Of the 61 consents located in the RPO, only 11 were for works that were visible above the ridgeline or skyline. The landscape assessment did not find any effects on the role of the eastern foothills as a natural visual backdrop to urban Auckland. The number and locations can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Consents in the D15 RPO during the monitoring period by zone.

Zone	Large Lot Zone	Rural and Coastal Settlement Zone	Foothills/ Waitākere Ranges and Foothills Zones	Business Local Centre Zone	Total
January 2016 – June 2021	21	13	23	4	61

Indicator 5

Subdivision, use, and development in the heritage area is subservient to the natural and rural landscape and character.



Example of vegetation removal required for accessway and landscaping around new development and vegetation screening.

What the indicator can tell us

The RPS encourages adaptability of the built environment to the natural context and development which is responsive to the natural landscape and vegetation. Heritage features and characteristics of the existing built and natural environment identified in the Act and the RPS limit development and activity that may overwhelm the heritage features. The plan-making approach taken in the WRHA enables development and activity where it is not adversely affecting the heritage features. Built environments which achieve subservience are commonly described as being “nestled into their surroundings” rather than appearing to be superimposed upon it or overwhelming the landscape. Subsistence within the WRHA is dependent on several AUP zones, precincts and overlays working together.

Findings

- The AUP promotes built environments that integrate with their natural surroundings in the WRHA. Vegetation screening and recessive design elements are effectively utilised to mitigate and obscure the visual effects of new development and integrate it into the landscape. Most new developments observed since the AUP became operative in 2016 have not resulted in large areas of permanent vegetation clearance or occupation of prominent landscape positions.
- In the H20 Residential – Waitākere Foothills Zone, increasing development pressures are leading to outcomes that conflict with the zone’s objectives of mirroring the H19 Rural – Countryside Living Zone and retaining rural character. These developments, often lacking in subservience to the natural environment, are more visible due to lower existing vegetation coverage and the greater capacity for growth intended in the H20 Zone.
- A high proportion (70 per cent) of resource consents in the WRHA where the sites are located in the H1 Residential - Large Lot Zone are for exceeding yard dimension standards, suggesting a loss of subservience (Table 3). Despite this, landscape assessments show only minor adverse effects on the subservience of development in the Titirangi North area. This discrepancy between actual outcomes and the AUP’s objectives, which aim to maintain and enhance the unique settlement pattern and landscape qualities of the Titirangi-Laingholm area, indicates inefficiencies in achieving the plan’s goals.

Table 3 Number of activities for subservience-related standards during the monitoring period by zone.

Zones	Total consents located in the zone	Total consents which trigger zone-related activities	Consents for building height standards	Consents for yard dimension standards	Consents for building coverage standards	Consents for max impervious area (residential only)	Consents for number of dwelling and property standards (rural only)
H1 – Residential - Large Lot	135	87	29%(25)	70%(61)	9%(8)	16%(14)	N/A
H2 – Residential - Rural and Coastal Settlement Zone	83	30	3%(1)	27%(8)	30%(9)	6%(2)	N/A
H20 – Rural – Waitākere Foothills Zone	102	61	7%(4)	34%(21)	57%(35)	N/A	25%(15)
H21 – Rural – Waitākere Ranges Zone	117	55	15%(8)	71%(39)	51%(28)	N/A	6%(9)

Indicator 6

The water supply catchments and their related supply functions are protected.

What the indicator can tell us

The measure mirrors the indicator and seeks to understand if the regulatory protections which sustain the WRHA's role in Auckland's freshwater supply provide for its continued operation.

Findings

- The AUP includes overlays and designations from previous planning documents to safeguard water supply functionality (Figure 3 below). These provisions ensure that the ecological health of catchments supplying water to reservoirs is maintained, thereby protecting the vitality of upstream sources for Auckland's water supply.
- The designations in the WRHA facilitate Watercare Services Limited's ability to conduct maintenance, upgrades, and service operations without requiring additional resource consents. The expansion of Watercare's infrastructure, exemplified by the new water treatment plant in Titirangi, was achieved within the existing designation boundaries and sought a balance between essential infrastructure provision and heritage feature protection.

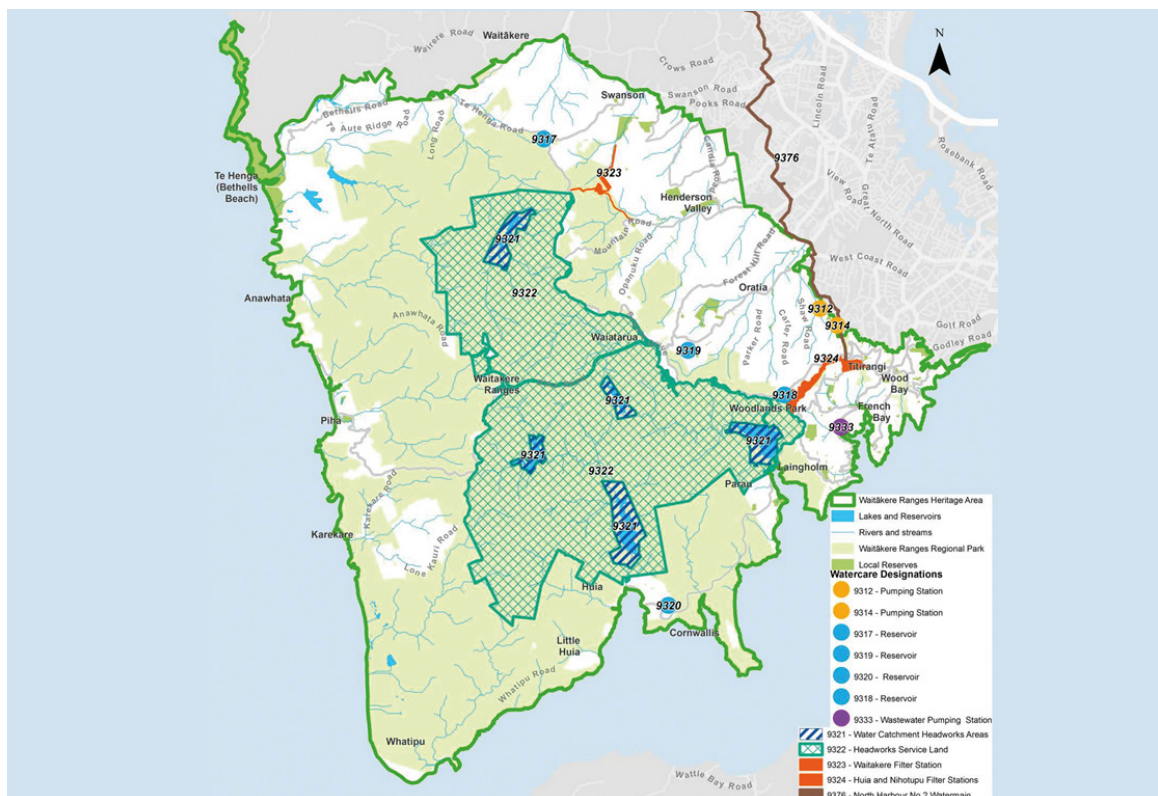


Figure 3 Planning protections for water supply purposes.

Indicator 7

Infrastructure and related activities are enabled, provided that the heritage features of the area are protected.



Integrated infrastructure response near Bethells beach.

What the indicator can tell us

Essential to the RPS's function to enable living, working, and recreation in the WRHA is the provision of infrastructure and transport networks. Requirements for infrastructure in the WRHA are dependent on other factors which contribute to use. These factors include the increased capacity of dwellings through subdivision, or the resulting use of transport and underground services. The indicator, and the Chapter D12 Objective that it mirrors, acknowledges the requirement of enabling infrastructure alongside development while accounting for the effects on heritage features that can result from extensive construction.

Findings

- Resource consent data reveals that heritage features are carefully considered during infrastructure development. Projects are organised to avoid adverse effects on indigenous vegetation and stormwater runoff effects on local waterways. Projects requiring vegetation removal and earthworks implement remediation and enhancement actions within their works.
- Works on landslips were a recurring activity in infrastructure consents. Landslips can compromise structures and disrupt access to and from communities. Preventative and reparative work on slips can be complicated and time-consuming, exacerbated by the WRHA's diverse topography and limited access routes. While these complexities are understandable, they do not diminish the validity of some residents' complaints regarding the time, disruption, and safety concerns caused by landslips and their repair on access routes.
- While infrastructure provision generally considers heritage features, there are some instances where it fails to integrate into the landscape. Infrastructure which is not consistent with the landscape in its design and implementation can introduce urban character to an environment.
- The WRHA faces significant infrastructure challenges related to telecommunications, flooding, and unstable land due to diverse topography and remoteness. Maintenance and development of infrastructure networks are crucial for safety, disaster preparedness, and maintaining vital connections with residents and communities.

Indicator 8

Natural vegetation cover is enhanced and indigenous vegetation is protected.



Looking southwest from the foothills towards the ranges. Cleared pastoral land in the foreground and heavier vegetation in the background.

What the indicator can tell us

Vegetation, alongside freshwater supply from above and below ground sources, is one of the most prominent natural resources in the WRHA. It is indicative of ecosystem health, along with providing habitat for terrestrial and freshwater species. The human experience of naturalness in the WRHA is largely due to its heavily vegetated landscape. Indigenous vegetation covers around 85 per cent of the WRHA and contributes to the identity of communities, recreational opportunities, scientific study, and conservation management.

Findings

- The various protective measures in place for indigenous vegetation in the WRHA have proven effective in safeguarding, restoring, and enhancing native and total vegetation coverage. Assisted and natural regrowth significantly exceeds the rate of vegetation removal. Indigenous biodiversity restoration is frequently achieved through weed removal conditions in resource consent conditions that are applicable during new subdivisions, uses, and activities. Additionally, enhancement areas established under Chapter D12 Schedules contribute to an overall increase in the protected vegetation area over time.
- The Chapter D13 Notable Trees Overlay specifically addresses tree removal, allowing for the necessary removal of trees while maintaining overall vegetation protection. This overlay ensures that tree removal is carefully considered and balanced with the need to preserve the area's natural environment.
- The multiple layers of protection for native vegetation, which vary based on zone, activity, and overlay, provide for and encourage the exploration of alternatives by applicants when applying for resource consents. The extent of the Significant Ecological Area Overlay can be seen in Figure 4 below.

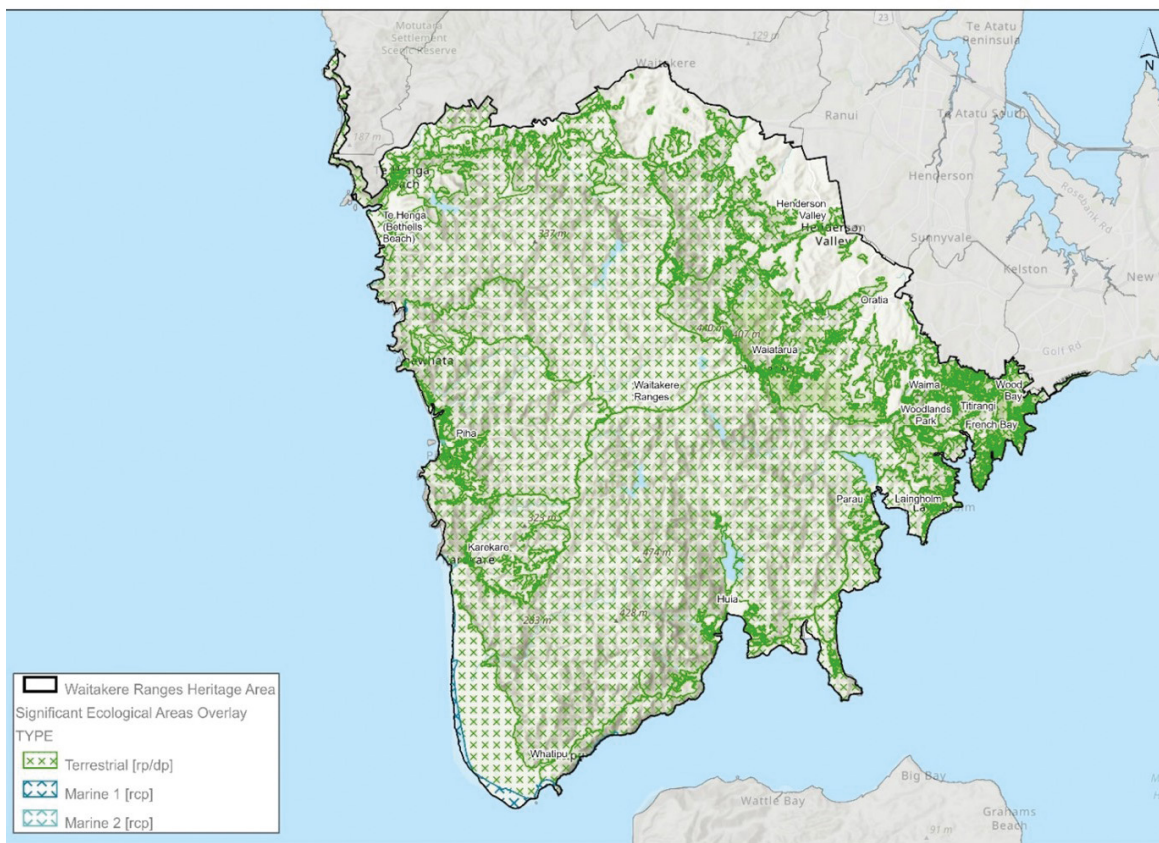


Figure 4 Extent of the Significant Ecological Area Overlay in the WRHA.

Summary of main findings

Where is the plan performing well?

- Development, activity, and land use has generally been low in the WRHA when compared to urban Auckland.
- A hierarchy of neighbourhood and local centres are supported by settlements which reflect their size, intensity, and remoteness.
- A robust network of community organisations is invested in social, cultural, and environmental kaitiakitanga/stewardship in the WRHA.
- Development has been consistent with the distinct character and historic heritage of settlements in the WRHA.
- Natural heritage is being sustainably managed and recognised for its intrinsic worth, protected from inappropriate use and restored and enhanced through activity.
- Growth is primarily located in areas of existing settlement and where additional capacity for development has been recognised.
- Subdivision is enabled where it is supported by infrastructure and at an appropriate scale and intensity that manages the cumulative effects of growth.
- Development is largely subservient to the natural environment and nestles into its surroundings through recessive design and vegetation screening.
- Water catchments and their associated supply functions are protected, and upgrades of facilities have been possible within existing designations.
- Infrastructure provision is responsive to natural heritage protection.

Where is the plan underperforming?

- Some infrastructure outcomes are not consistent with historic heritage features and introduce urban outcomes which are out of character with rural environments.
- Inconsistency between the standards of the AUP H1 Residential – Large Lot Zone and settlement patterns in the Titirangi/Laingholm area is leading to the objectives of the AUP not being met.
- Pressure for development and a greater capacity for growth is leading to outcomes in the eastern foothills which are not of rural character.

Recommendations from these findings are not included in this summary report. See the technical report for more detail and recommendations.

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