

Park-specific management and policies
Akatarawa Forest



6 Park-specific management and policies

6.1 Akatarawa Forest

6.1.1 Legal status

Title held:	Wellington Regional Council
Legislative status:	Administered under Local Government Act 2002, Wellington Regional Water Board Act 1972
Territorial Authority:	Kapiti Coast District Council, Upper Hutt City Council

The land is held fee simple for the purposes of recreation, forestry and water supply, vested pursuant to the Wellington Regional Water Board Act 1972, and subject also to the Wellington Regional Council (Water Board Functions) Act 2005.

Refer to Appendix 2 for legal description of land parcels.

6.1.2 Background

Akatarawa Forest is located in the steep hill country of the Akatarawa Ranges, from the west of the Hutt Valley to the Kapiti Coast. The forest covers 15,500 hectares and is the largest forest/park managed by Greater Wellington. It contains pockets of original and larger regenerating lowland podocarp forest, as well as areas of exotic plantations. The forest has important environmental, cultural and heritage values, and provides for a wide range of recreational opportunities.

In terms of the lower North Island, the area's indigenous values are considered to be ecologically significant. There are several wetlands in the Akatarawa and Whakatikei River catchments. Past logging of podocarp from large areas of the Akatarawa Forest has left a mosaic of forest, bush and shrub lands, which provide for a high diversity of bird and insect life. Some 1,000 hectares of original lowland podocarp forest and 500 hectares of red beech/miro/rimu forest still

remain in parts of the Akatarawa Forest. In addition, small but significant, stands of the original montane totara/kamahahi and miro/kamahahi forest remain on high ridges around the peaks of Mounts Maunganui, Wainui, Titi and Barton.

Akatarawa Forest's ecological values are regionally important and include representative examples of original montane and lowland forest inhabitants, including rare ferns, and a rich bird life. Each of the region's surviving indigenous bird species are found here, including long-tailed cuckoos, tui, whitehead and New Zealand falcon. Importantly, Akatarawa Forest links with other publicly held land, making it part of the ecological corridor between the Tararua, Rimutaka Ranges and Orongorongo.

Māori sites of significance are limited, as there were few early permanent Māori settlements in the area. Māori often moved through the area travelling to the Wairarapa and the west coast. It was an area of mahinga kai used extensively for hunting birds and fishing, as well as gathering forest foods and materials. Ngāti Toa Rangātira and Wellington based Taranaki iwi retain mana whenua over the lands. European settlers logged the area for its valuable timber resources, including rimu and totara. Old logging tracks and milling relics are scattered throughout the forest.

Akatarawa Forest also includes approximately 3,000 hectares of exotic species, mainly mixed age pine and macrocarpa forest (part of Greater Wellington's plantation forests).

These exotic forests include the Whakatikei, Valley View, Hukinga, Maungakotukutuku, Akatarawa Saddle and Puketiro blocks. These are managed primarily for commercial purposes but also provide some recreational opportunities. This plan does not cover the forestry operations or harvesting, as these are covered by operational plans for Greater Wellington's production forestry.

Akatarawa Forest provides the opportunity for backcountry oriented recreation. The area has become the main location for motorised recreation (vehicles and bikes), utilising the road network for forestry and track, both past and present. It is also an important area for mountain biking (including the internationally renowned Karapoti Classic mountain bike course), as well as hunting. The Cannon Point Walkway and Birchville Dam are popular with walkers, while trampers and hunters use the more remote track network. Various groups, including the Army and Police, carry out exercises in the forest.

Land status - a future water collection area

The Akatarawa and Pakuratahi Forests are potential water sources for the region's future generations. The term *future water* collection areas refer to land held under the Wellington Regional Water Board Act 1972¹⁰ for water supply purposes that are not yet used for water supply. Some land is also held and/or used for exotic plantation forestry. Full legal descriptions of the land parcels can be found in the Appendix 2.

Protecting and sustaining the water resource for future generations is paramount and is achieved by protecting and sustainably managing the forest ecosystems. This plan provides a framework for this management. Vegetation binds the soil, helping maintain the area's physical and ecological integrity that in turn influences water quality, particularly in steep forested areas. Rivers, streams and wetlands directly contribute to water quality and the values of these resources must be maintained. In the past, land management focused on water quality values alone. However, an important outcome of that management is the significant contribution to regional indigenous biodiversity.

Holding the land for future water collection purposes does not preclude access to and recreational use of these areas but does provide a "bottom-line" for management.

Off-road recreation

The Akatarawa Forest is one of the few places in the Wellington region where the wider community can undertake off-road activities with motorbikes, quads and 4WD vehicles. The area also caters for a range of mountain biking and multisport events. The Akatarawa Recreational Access Committee (ARAC) whose membership is made up of 4WD, off-road enthusiasts and other like minded groups who use the Akatarawa Forest for a range of recreation opportunities, jointly developed the Motorised Recreation User Code and Management Guidelines (1997) with Greater Wellington.¹¹

ARAC was formed to be a voice for the user groups within the forests and is one of many groups that work alongside Greater Wellington to promote the values of the parks and develop opportunities to be involved. Refer to Map 20 for a map of the area approved for use by motorised recreation, and to Greater Wellington website for more information.

6.1.3 Park key characteristics

Land

- Future water supply area
- Native forested areas including original montane and lowland forest (regionally significant) and wetlands
- Important ecological linkages from the Kapiti Coast to the Tararua Ranges
- Productive landscape (commercial plantation forestry).

¹⁰ Wellington Regional Council (Water Board Functions) Act 2005.

¹¹ The motorised recreation user code outlines the restrictions and behaviour standards necessary to meeting statutory obligations protecting the environment, other recreational users and adjoining landowners.

People

- History of logging and associated historic structures
- Remote experiences, including tramping and hunting on forestry roads, tracks and routes
- Motorised recreation in a remote location, including 4WD, motorcycle and quad bike events
- Karapoti area for mountain biking, including an annual national mountain biking event.

6.1.4 Management focus

The primary focus for Akatarawa Forest is to:

1. Manage the water resource within the future water collection area to ensure that it is healthy and that its potential as a sustainable source of secure, fresh, clean water for the region in the future is protected
2. Ensure there is provision for water supply infrastructure as required.

The secondary focus is to:

3. Protect the native forest vegetation
4. Manage forestry production on a rotational basis
5. Ensure a range of back-country recreational experiences are offered
6. Manage the current network of tracks for activities including motorised recreation
7. Allow wind energy development on selected ridgelines.

6.1.5 Specific policies for Akatarawa Forest

Biodiversity and ecosystems

- a. To have particular regard for the high priority indigenous areas when determining ecosystem protection and enhancement priorities, as listed in Table 2.

Landscape and geological features

- b. To protect the park's key landscape features and values from inappropriate use and development, specifically:
 - The steep forested valleys and crest of hilltops
 - The backdrop of Mt Wainui to the Kapiti Coast.

Cultural heritage

- c. To protect significant modified landscape features of the Birchville dam, historic logging tramways and any associated historic logging structures.

Land management

- d. To keep Mt Wainui remote area free from formal tracks and developments.
- e. To preserve existing small-scale exotic woodlots and stands through their natural life for amenity values and cultural associations, and upon the demise of these stands, to leave the land to regenerate in indigenous forest, unless it is located within existing plantation forest.
- f. To allow for the development of the Greater Wellington Regional Council approved wind farm development adjacent to Battle Hill Farm Forest Park, and associated utility infrastructure.

Visitor services

- g. To offer varied opportunities for park users by providing multiple use tracks and facilities where possible, appropriate and compatible with the primary management outcome of future water supply.
- h. To allow public access on foot or bicycle to all parts of the park, subject to:
 - Temporary or localised restrictions where plantation forestry operations are taking place
 - Other management purposes (including but not limited to: spraying, fire management and pest management).
- i. To allow public access by motorised vehicles on designated tracks subject to:
 - All clubs and individuals following the principles of Tread Lightly and the Motorised Recreational User Code and Management Guidelines 1997
 - Periodic or localised restrictions, eg, when plantation forestry operations occur.
- j. To maintain with ARAC and community input, the Orange Hut, as a shelter for recreationalists in the forest.
- k. To liaise with Upper Hutt City Council and Kapiti Coast District Council regarding provision of vehicle parking areas and other facilities at park entrances.
- l. To manage the following as the main public entrances:
 - Maungakotukutuku (Raumati – off Maungakotukutuku Road)
 - Karapoti (Upper Hutt – off Karapoti Road).

- m. To maintain the following secondary entrances:
 - Via Battle Hill Regional Park (ridge entrance)
 - Bulls Run/ Cooks Road (off Moonshine Road)
 - Valley View Road (Totara Park – Upper Hutt)
 - Tulsa Park and Bridge Road (Totara Park and Upper Hutt).
- n. To require applicants to give three months notice and public notification of any closure of the Akatarawa Forest.

Partnership in parks

- o. To recognise Ngāti Toa Rangatira and the Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust's relationship to the park through:
 - Participation in assessment of the significant features of the park
 - Identification of traditional trails through the park.
- p. To support a partnership approach to maintaining the Akatarawa catchment through:
 - Maintaining water quality of the Akatarawa catchment
 - Protecting and enhancing the indigenous forest cover and insect and bird life
 - Maintaining the habitat for indigenous fish.
- q. To support the partnership with ARAC (Akatarawa Recreational Access Committee) in meeting the outcomes of this plan.
- r. To ensure that any new partnerships contribute to an advocacy, restoration or education outcome for Akatarawa Forest.

Table 2 – Significant indigenous environmental areas and features – Akatarawa Forest

AREA	DESCRIPTION	REASONS FOR SIGNIFICANCE
General	Indigenous bird, fish and macroinvertebrate habitat	Threatened species: kaka (nationally endangered) New Zealand falcon (nationally vulnerable) kereru (gradual decline) yellow crowned kākāriki (gradual decline) long finned eel (gradual decline) giant kokopu (gradual decline) dwarf galaxiids (gradual decline) koura (gradual decline).
Mt Wainui	Lowland to montane miro rimu/kamahi forest on lower hill slopes; montane halls totara – kamahi forest on upper hill slopes	Regional example of montane miro-kamahi forest. Contains rare ferns and original pre-European forest types for the area. Relatively unmodified on upper slopes. Snow grass species are found at the summit. <i>Adiantum fulvum</i> (regionally sparse) <i>Adiantum viridescens</i> (regionally sparse) <i>Streblus banksii</i> (nationally sparse).
Mt Barton, Maunganui, Titi and Wainui Summits	Hill slopes and summits: Montane miro-kamahi forest. Main ridges: Montane Halls totara – kamahi forest.	Representative examples of montane podocarp – broadleaved forest types, little modified from pre-European times. Hall's totara-kamahi forest occurs on only two peaks in the Region - Mt Wainui and Maunganui. Maunganui and Wainui summits identified in the Kapiti Coast District Council District Plan's Heritage Register (E17).
Upper Akatarawa Valley	Lowland to montane red beech/ rimu/kamahi forest and rimu/ rata/hinau/kamahi forest. Lowland podocarp/kamahi forest; lowland to montane hard beech forest; montane kamahi forest	One of few remaining large areas of accessible and reasonably unmodified native forest. Contains excellent stands of Hall's totara. High scenic and recreational value. Important habitat and natural corridor values. Identified in the Kapiti Coast District Council District Plan's Heritage Register (E17). Significant species: <i>Brachyglottis kirkii var kirkii</i> – Kirks Tree Daisy (nationally serious decline, regionally critical) <i>Drucella integristipula</i> (a threatened liverwort only known from a handful of sites in New Zealand) <i>Trichomanes strictum</i> – fern (nationally sparse, regionally data deficient) <i>Trichomanes colensoi</i> – fern (nationally sparse, regionally critical) <i>Trichomanes elongatum</i> – fern (regionally critical), <i>Grammitis pseudociliata</i> – strap fern (regionally deficient data) <i>Hymenophyllum atrovirens</i> (nationally sparse, regionally critical).

AREA	DESCRIPTION	REASONS FOR SIGNIFICANCE
Akatarawa, West Deep Creek, Plateau	Unmodified red beech forest with some podocarp forest to the north	In the 1980s this area was recommended to become a formally recognised as a conservation area. Kākāriki are present in numbers. Identified in the Kapiti Coast District Council District Plan's Heritage Register (E17).
Draper's Flat Martin's River Whakatikei Headwaters Valley View	Raupo wetland Kahikatea swamp Kahikatea, sphagnum moss Manuka, sphagnum moss	Akatarawa wetlands: these wetlands all provide important examples of threatened wetland ecosystems. Martin's River and Whakatikei headwater wetlands have been identified as wetlands of national importance for biodiversity.

6.1.6 Projected changes

Refer to Map 4 (following pages).

- Work with the Department of Conservation and other landowners to develop recreational links to the Kapiti Coast and Queen Elizabeth Park.
- Proposed or potential renewable-energy and water supply development.
- Undertake wetland restoration projects.
- Monitor effects of pest control programmes.

6.1.7 Park maps

The following pages contain:

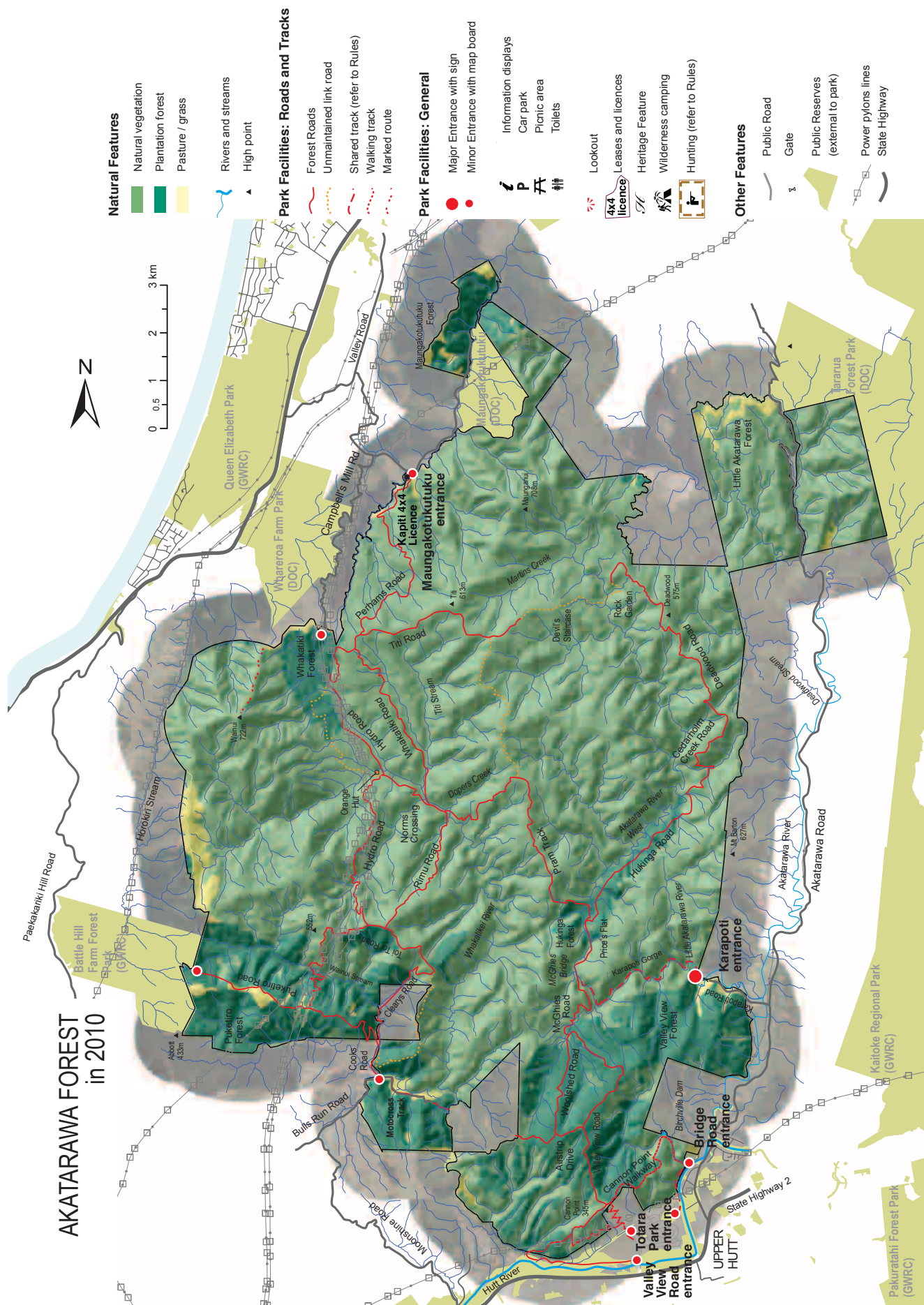
- Map 3: Akatarawa Forest in 2010
- Map 4: Akatarawa Forest projected future changes.

For more information

Greater Wellington Plantation Forest Working Plan 2000-2010 (for information on the forestry operations, including harvesting)

Regional Forest Lands Resource Statement (Greater Wellington, 2008)

AKATARAWA FOREST in 2010



To be read in conjunction with 2010 map

