

Notification on the protection and restoration of native flora in Hihitahi Forest Sanctuary

The Department of Conservation (DOC) plans to restore the kamahi/Hall's totara forest and general native birds by reducing possum and rat numbers.

Native species in Hihitahi

Hihitahi Forest is a unique, large, forested area south of Waiouru and the central plateau that is home to many native plant and bird species.

It is an isolated forest of kamahi and It includes the headwater of Kaitapa stream and tributaries of the Hautapu river. The forest is one of the last significant areas of kamahi and totara for the wider district. Other native species living in the forest include karearea/New Zealand falcon, kākārīki, kākā, kererū, koekoeā/long-tailed cuckoo and potentially pekapeka-tou-roa/long-tailed bats.

Hihitahi Forest is home to endangered plant species such as Hall's or mountain totara (*Podocarpus laetus*), *Dactylanthus taylorii* and *Pittosporum turneri*.

Threats to native species

Animal pests are one of the biggest threats to native species in Hihitahi Forest. Mustelids (stoats and ferrets) are the main predators of forest birds. Rats also prey on smaller birds, while possums are a significant threat to threatened plants. Predation by stoats, rats and possums can lead to native species facing local extinction.

Why we are controlling rats and stoats

Hihitahi Forest has had aerial pest control using biodegradable sodium fluoroacetate (Pronature, formerly known as 1080) previously, and it is important that this control continues,



Hall's or mountain totara Photo: NZ Plant Conservation

to protect the native species here. In Hihitahi Forest, the Department of Conservation is to carry out predator control over 2,219 ha (see attached map). This will give native flora and forest birds a chance to recover from browsing and predation respectively.

Predator control works

Previously there were aerial pest operations carried out by the Department, with the last in 2012. These were taken over by OSPRI for TB free purposes. The last control operation occurred in 2016.

DOC's monitoring has been focussed on native flora species with the use of aerial foliage browse index (AFBI) monitoring. Results from 2013 show that browse of canopy species had worsened.

Breeding success for native birds has not specifically been monitored in the forest in recent years.

Consultation

DOC has engaged and continues to work closely with iwi and hapū for the Hihitahi Forest area on this operation. The Department has also consulted with stakeholders and affected landowners and the community.

This consultation included discussion of the operation; its effects, and how to mitigate any effects of the operation on the surrounding land and community (refer to map).

Use of a range of predator control methods to protect species.

Aerial application of cereal pellets containing sodium fluoroacetate is the most effective control method over large areas. It is the only viable method in remote, rugged terrain such as Hihitahi Forest.

Ground-based trapping and bait stations are effective in smaller more accessible areas, however the number of possum, rodents and stoats can overwhelm trapping networks.

In Hihitahi Forest, the use of aerial Pronature is essential. Operations will target possums and rats. Stoats are also reduced effectively as they eat possums and rats.

Time frame

The aerial operation is planned for June to July 2025. The operation is weather dependent.

Notifications

Following feedback from consultation, decisions were made on changes to treatment boundaries and other considerations to the operational plan to address any issues raised.

This notification fact sheet is being distributed closer to the time of the delivery of the operation to provide feedback on the consultation and confirm any changes to the boundary and timeframe.

Also, our contractor will contact all neighbours, place a notice in the local newspaper, and put up warning signs



Stoat with dead chick. Photo: DOC

at entrances to public conservation land immediately prior to the operation starting.

The Department will contact iwi, landowners and stakeholders after the operation to inform them that the operation has been completed successfully.

The use of Pronature requires permission from the local Public Health Protection office of the Ministry of Health.

DOC assesses vertebrate predator control operations that use a toxin on behalf of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). DOC staff follow procedures approved by the EPA. These regulations ensure that the toxin is applied safely to safeguard the public and the environment.

Key Facts: What you need to know.

- Pronature is a manufactured, biodegradable toxin. It's active ingredient, fluoroacetate is salt that occurs naturally in poisonous plants in Australia, Africa and Brazil.
- It does not accumulate. It is broken down naturally by micro-organisms, fungi and plants into harmless compounds and does not leave permanent residues in soil, water, plants or animals.
- The Department of Conservation complies with all relevant regulations and takes a precautionary

approach to the aerial application of biodegradable Pronature.

- All operations begin with an aerial pre-feed of non-toxic bait to prime possums and rodents to eat the toxic bait that will be applied afterwards.
- The toxic cereal bait pellets contain 0.15% of 1080. They are about 2cm long, cylindrical and dyed green. Non-toxic prefeed cereal pellets are about 2cm long, cylindrical and sandy coloured (not-dyed).

Managing risk

Pronature is poisonous to humans, domestic and game animals. Dogs are highly susceptible. In areas where the toxin has been applied, the risk to dogs will remain until poisoned carcasses have disintegrated, which can be more than six months.

These risks can be eliminated by following these rules:

DO NOT touch bait

WATCH children at all times

DO NOT EAT animals from this area

Toxic baits and carcasses are **DEADLY to DOGS**

Observe these rules whenever you see warning signs about pesticides. These warning signs indicate pesticide residues may be still present in baits and animals. When signs are removed this means you can resume normal activities in the area.

For more information

The Department of Conservation, Tongariro Office is responsible for this operation. For more information about the operation, please contact us during normal business hours here:

Phone: +64 7 892 3729

Email: tongarirovc@doc.govt.nz

Pesticide summaries: Animal pests (doc.govt.nz)



Pittosporum turneri Photo: DOC

Hihitahi Sanctuary. Application area

This map shows the application area for predator control. It is indicative: the boundaries have changed due to consultation and other operation planning and permission requirements.

