

Draft District Plan Fact Sheet: Significant Natural Areas (SNAs)



Why are SNAs important?

Diverse plant and animal communities stabilise our natural environment and make them more resilient. They purify our air and help provide for flood mitigation, climate stabilisation, erosion control, water purification, plant pollination, disease control, nutrient cycling, soil formation and photosynthesis. They also provide us with food, water, medicines, wood and fire.

The transitional habitats between land and water have many important functions. We have lots of those in Wellington, such as Makara and Karori Stream. These places attract visitors and provide us with recreational opportunities that keeps us healthy, both mentally and physically.



Why are we protecting SNAs?

Many of our native ecosystems have been cleared or damaged and we have unique plants and ecological systems that are at risk. In 2019 Wellington City Council declared an ecological and climate change emergency. As we plan for growth, it's vital that we protect the remaining areas where we can.

The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) requires Councils to recognise and provide for the 'protection of significant indigenous vegetation and habitats of indigenous fauna' as a matter of national importance (RMA s6(c)). The Wellington Regional Policy Statement has two policies that give effect to this national direction:

- Policy 23: Identifying indigenous ecosystems and habitats with significant indigenous biodiversity values – district and regional plans.
- Policy 24: Protecting indigenous ecosystems and habitats with significant indigenous biodiversity values – district and regional plans.

Policy 23 also sets out the criteria by which ecosystems and habitats should be assessed to determine whether they are 'significant'. These criteria are explained in more detail below.

The SNA identification and mapping work, and now the proposed protection through the Draft District Plan, are a direct result of this national and regional mandate.



How are SNAs identified?

For an area to be classified as a significant natural area, it must meet one or more of the following criteria, which are set out in Policy 23 of the Wellington Regional Policy Statement:

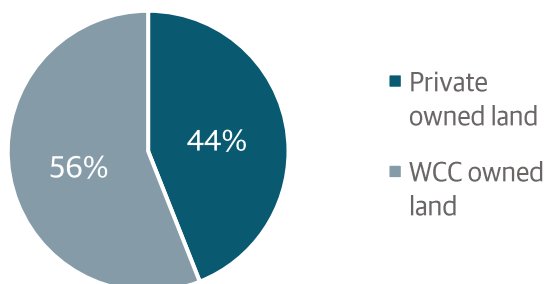
- (a) Representativeness: the ecosystems or habitats that are typical and characteristic examples of the full range of the original or current natural diversity of ecosystem and habitat types in a district or in the region, and:
 - (i) are no longer commonplace (less than about 30% remaining); or
 - (ii) are poorly represented in existing protected areas (less than about 20% legally protected).

- (b) **Rarity:** the ecosystem or habitat has biological or physical features that are scarce or threatened in a local, regional or national context. This can include individual species, rare and distinctive biological communities and physical features that are unusual or rare.
- (c) **Diversity:** the ecosystem or habitat has a natural diversity of ecological units, ecosystems, species and physical features within an area.
- (d) **Ecological context of an area:** the ecosystem or habitat:
 - (i) enhances connectivity or otherwise buffers representative, rare or diverse indigenous ecosystems and habitats; or
 - (ii) provides seasonal or core habitat for protected or threatened indigenous species.
- (e) **Tangata whenua values:** the ecosystem or habitat contains characteristics of special spiritual, historical or cultural significance to tangata whenua, identified in accordance with tikanga Māori.



What has the process been so far?

- The SNA work started as part of the Backyard Tāonga project in 2016. The Backyard Tāonga project was about identifying highly valued significant natural features and landscapes, including SNAs, around Wellington City.
- To identify SNAs, ecologists completed a desktop study that was based mainly on aerial imagery, local site references and public viewing spots. We gathered information relating to resource consents, Maori heritage sites, QEII covenants, freshwater and wetland information layers, as well as District Plan zoning layers to further confirm our information.
- Using these methods and working with ecologists we identified over 160 land areas that met one or more of the SNA criteria. A first draft of the SNA boundaries was mapped by 2019. Approximately 44 percent of the SNAs are on private property, while 56 percent are on public land.



- In 2019, we sent letters out to all private landowners who had identified SNAs on their land, asking them to let us know if they think there is anything not right about the information we have. Since then, we have undertaken over 150 site visits at the request of landowners to verify whether the area meets the criteria, and to double check the boundaries. As a result of these site visits and talking to landowners, there have been many minor adjustments to boundaries to ensure we have things right.
- In 2020, we went out for public consultation on the Wellington City Draft Spatial Plan, which included the ongoing work on SNAs.
- The Draft District Plan now includes the proposed rules for protecting SNAs and what activities are permitted.



What are the new SNA rules proposed in the Draft District Plan?

This section provides an overview of the proposed rules, with references to the rules in the Draft District Plan so you can find them easily. Please see the Draft District Plan for the full rules and standards.

Activities permitted within SNAs that would not require resource consent:

- The trimming or removal of exotic vegetation.
- Restoration and maintenance of an SNA.
- Trimming or removal of indigenous vegetation (Rule ECO-R1.1) within an SNA for:
 - Maintenance within 3m of existing buildings
 - Maintaining the operation of roads, rail, and public accesses
 - Maintaining, upgrading or creating new public walking or cycling tracks
 - Restoration and conservation activities including plant and animal pest control
 - Natural hazard and fire risk mitigation
 - Addressing an imminent threat to people or property
 - Construction and maintenance of fences for stock or animal control
 - Tangata whenua to exercise customary harvesting practices
- Within the Rural Zone (Rule ECO-R1.2), trimming or removal of indigenous vegetation within an SNA for:
 - Construction or maintenance of perimeter fences for stock or pest exclusion up to 2m in width.

Activities within SNAs that would require resource consent:

- Any other removal of indigenous vegetation not specified above.
- Vegetation clearance for the construction of a new house on a vacant site would be a controlled activity (meaning resource consent must be granted but there may be conditions to comply with).
- New plantation forestry is a non-complying activity, meaning it would not generally be allowed.

It is important to note that the Draft District Plan is a non-statutory document and the proposed rules do not have legal effect at this stage. When the Proposed District Plan is notified mid-2022 the SNA rules will start to apply.

The specific Draft District Plan chapter relating to SNAs is *Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity*. This is located in Part 2 of the Draft District Plan in the section on Natural Environment Values.

You can view the provisions for Significant Natural Areas in the Draft District Plan here:

<https://eplan.wellington.govt.nz/draft/#Rules/0/218/1/0/0>

You can find more information about Backyard Tāonga, the work we have done, and how we got here at:

<https://planningforgrowth.wellington.govt.nz/about/backyard-taonga>

For more information on how to make a submission, visit

<https://planningforgrowth.wellington.govt.nz/district-plan-review>