

Protect our species in Waitutu Forest



Pest control to protect native species from widespread predator plagues.

A heavy seeding (mast) occurred in many forests in early 2019. This natural event, that should benefit native species, has been hijacked by introduced predators. Rodent and stoat numbers have skyrocketed. Seed fall and rodent levels are monitored at sites where rare and endangered native species are under greatest threat. When rodent numbers meet critical levels, that will trigger predator control. Without predator control some species such as mohua, kākā, orange-fronted parakeet/kākāriki karaka, rock wren/pīwauwau, and bats/Pekapeka will suffer heavy losses.

Predicting increased rodent populations - 2014 and 2016

A widespread heavy seed fall in South Island beech forests in early 2014 and again in 2016 led to escalating rat and mice numbers. Two events of such magnitude in quick succession was thought to be unusual. DOC, with the help of NIWA, is getting better at predicting these mast events.

Pest control works

DOC carried out aerial 1080 pest control in the winters following the prolific flowering over more than 600,000 hectares each season. Monitoring showed an average rat kill of about 95% which reduced rodents to undetectable levels at most sites. Stoat plagues were avoided.

Outcomes

Intensive species monitoring showed the nesting success of rock wren, mohua, robin and rifleman was significantly higher within pest control areas than outside. <https://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/battle-for-our-birds/>

2019/20 – The battle continues

Extensive seeding has occurred again in 2019 but on an even larger scale. This is the biggest mast in decades. We have a major pest problem on our hands.



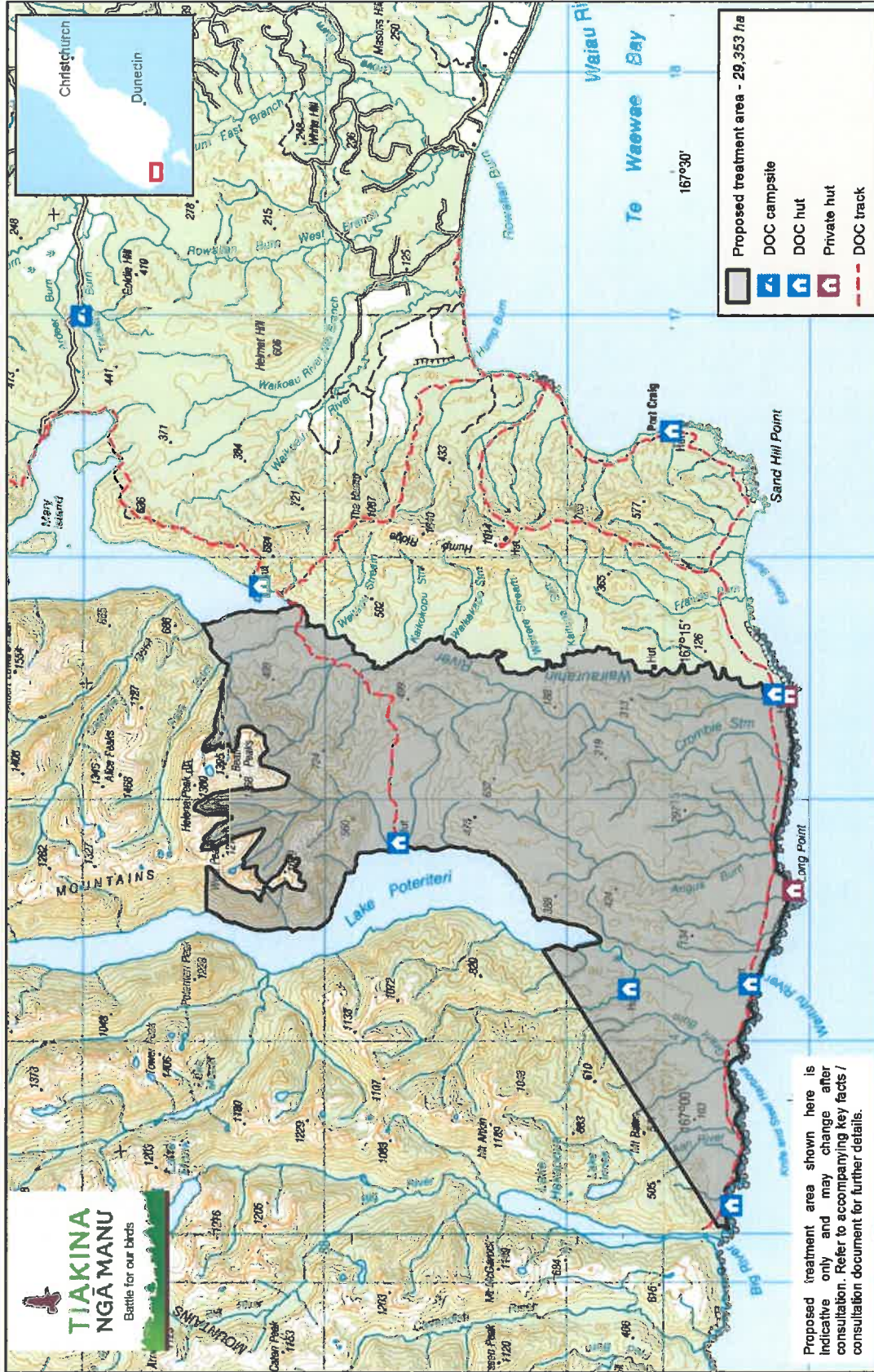
Grant Burn, Waitutu Forest. Photo: DOC



A ship rat attacks a bird nest. Photo: DOC



The Waitutu Forest. Photo: DOC



Proposed treatment area shown here is indicative only and may change after consultation. Refer to accompanying key facts / consultation document for further details.

Waitutu
Aerial Predator Control 2020
Proposed treatment area: 29,353 ha



Waitutu Forest sites and values

Where heavy seed fall occurred, predator numbers have soared. To protect native species at risk, DOC is planning and undertaking predator control at several Fiordland sites, including Waitutu Forest.

The Waitutu Forest is one of the largest tracts of unmodified lowland forest left in New Zealand. Covering an area of 45,000 ha, the Waitutu area stretches from the Princess Mountains in the north to the south coast, and includes the large pristine lakes Hauroko, Poteriteri and Hakapoua.

The uplifted marine terraces of the Waitutu area are both nationally and internationally significant. The forest is one of the most diverse in Fiordland with large areas dominated by rata, rimu and miro. It is also a strong-hold for South Island kākā and is a nationally important mistletoe site.

Waitutu Forest Restoration

DOC is carrying out a restoration programme covering 30,000 ha of Waitutu Forest between the Wairaurahiri River in the east and Big River in the west. There is a significant section of Māori land in this area and, with the support of iwi and the Nature Heritage Fund, DOC has so far carried out three aerial 1080 operations (2010, 2014, 2016) to control predators and protect threatened species.

Prior to these control operations, monitoring work showed predator numbers within Waitutu were very high, and that several threatened native species were on the brink of local extinction. The mistletoe population had been severely impacted by possum browse, while predation by possums and stoats had resulted in a skewed sex ratio in the kākā population of six males to every one female. South Island robins were rarely seen.

Following the three 1080 operations, kākā have increased significantly. Nesting females are surviving to rear young and the sex ratio has recovered to a healthy 1.7 males to every 1 female. Robin numbers are thriving, fern birds and falcons are becoming more conspicuous, and general forest bird abundance has increased. Mistletoe takes longer to recover, however, it is likely that further mistletoe decline by possum browse has been halted.

2019's mega-mast has seen plagues of rodents soar across Fiordland. Tracking tunnel monitoring in Waitutu has shown rodents increasing from a detectable level of 1% in Feb to over 22% in August. Without control, rats will become a food source for stoats, increasing their population size, and, also switch to preying on native species. To ensure the gains made to date for native species in Waitutu are not lost, large-scale predator control must be carried out in early 2020 so that threatened native species are protected.



South Island robin are thriving in the Waitutu Forest as a result of predator control. Photo: DOC



The Waitutu Forest is a stronghold for South Island kaka. Photo: Toni Ellis

A range of pest control methods will be used including traps and toxins

Aerial application of 1080 baits is the most cost-effective predator control method over large areas. It is the only viable method in remote or rugged terrain. In more accessible areas, traps or bait stations will be laid, depending on the density of pest populations. High predator numbers can overwhelm trapping networks in some areas. In those cases, aerial 1080 pest control will supplement existing trapping.

Aerial 1080 pest control will target rats, but stoats will also be killed through eating poisoned rodent carcasses. Operations begin with an aerial pre-feed of non-toxic baits to encourage rats to eat the 1080 baits that are applied later.

Time frame

Operations will be triggered as rodent populations reach monitored thresholds. This operation, which is weather dependent, is planned to take place between February and April 2020. Dates will vary between sites and will be confirmed closer to operations taking place.

Planning

DOC is working closely with iwi and consulting with key stakeholders before finalising details. Before operations begin, DOC will contact affected neighbours, put up warning signs and advertise in local newspapers. Use of 1080 requires the consent of the Environmental Protection Authority, and permission from the Ministry of Health. The process includes an assessment of environmental effects (AEE) to safeguard the public and the environment.

What you need to know

The Department of Conservation complies with all relevant regulations and takes a precautionary approach to the aerial application of pesticides.

- *The 1080 cereal baits are about 2 cm long, cylinder-shaped and are dyed green.*
- *Non-toxic pre-feed cereal pellets are about 2 cm long, cylinder-shaped but are fawn-coloured (not dyed).*

Managing Risk

Dogs in particular are highly susceptible to 1080. The risk to dogs from poisoned carcasses will remain until they have completely rotted, perhaps for more than 6 months.

Precautionary approach

Risks can be eliminated by following these simple rules:

- *DO NOT touch bait*
- *WATCH CHILDREN at all times*
- *DO NOT EAT animals from this area*
- *Poison baits or carcasses are DEADLY to DOGS*

Observe these rules whenever you see warning signs about pesticides. Warning signs indicate pesticide residues may still be present in baits or animals. When signs are removed, this means you can resume normal activities in the area. Please report suspected vandalism or unauthorised removal of signs. If in doubt, check with your local DOC office.

More information

Nedra Burns (Operations Manager)
Te Anau District Office
03 249 0200

What to do if you suspect poisoning
Contact emergency services: 111
National Poisons Centre: 0800 764 766

04/10/2019

Also see www.doc.govt.nz/battleforourbirds