

4.8. Ecosystems And Natural Habitats

4.8.1. Key Issue

4.8.1.1. Recognising the importance of ecosystems and natural habitats and their contribution to the character and quality of the natural and physical environment, and to the wellbeing of the people and communities of Buller.

4.8.2. Buller District is particularly well endowed with a range of natural habitats and ecosystems, much of which is managed by the Department of Conservation. Areas of significant wetland and forest may also be present on private land.

4.8.3. The key considerations are:

4.8.3.1. The preservation of the natural character of wetlands and coastal and freshwater ecosystems and habitats.

4.8.3.2. The protection of such ecosystems and natural habitats from inappropriate use, subdivision and development.

4.8.3.3. The protection of areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna contained in those ecosystems.

4.8.4. Natural areas hold a number of different values; economic, aesthetic, ecological, recreational and visual for people and communities in Buller and for visitors from other parts of New Zealand and overseas. While some of these values or uses may be complementary, others conflict. For example introduced wild and domestic plant and animal species and activities which modify the land can potentially have an adverse effect on indigenous bird species, regenerating forest, lowland riparian vegetation, wetlands and estuaries.

4.8.5. The natural "untouched" character of much of the District represents a significant tourist asset. Tourism as an activity, particularly nature-based tourism, is recognised as having significant growth potential for Buller. Other potential and actual users of the resource include forestry, sphagnum moss harvesting, recreation and primary industry.

4.8.6. Objective

4.8.6.1. To protect areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna and to recognise their importance to the character and quality of the natural and physical environment and to the wellbeing of the people and communities in Buller.

4.8.7. Policies

- 4.8.7.1. *The adverse effects of land use activities on natural habitats and ecosystems shall be taken into account when considering development proposals which impact on these areas.*
- 4.8.7.2. *The protection and enhancement of the natural values of wetlands, estuarine habitats, whitebait spawning areas, significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna shall be encouraged.*
- 4.8.7.3. *To control the modification of significant natural wetlands to protect their natural character, landscape values, and their significance as areas of indigenous vegetation and habitats of indigenous fauna, and to sustain their life supporting capacity as indigenous ecosystems.*
- 4.8.7.4. *For the purposes of Section 6(c) of the Resource Management Act 1991, the following criteria will be used as guidelines to identify areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna.*
1. **Representativeness:** *The area is one of the best examples of an association of species which is typical of the ecological district.*
 2. **Distinctiveness:** *The area has indigenous species or an association of indigenous species which is unusual or rare in the ecological district, or endemic, or reaches its distribution limit.*
 3. **Intactness:** *The area has a cover of predominantly indigenous vegetation, is little modified by human activity, and is not affected in a major way by weed or pest species.*
 4. **Size:** *The area of indigenous vegetation or habitat is 5ha or more in size or together with adjacent indigenous habitat is larger than 5ha; or in the case of natural wetlands is larger than 1ha in size.*
 5. **Protected Status:** *The area has been set aside by statute or covenant for protection or preservation.*
 6. **Connectivity:** *The area is connected to one or more other significant areas in a way (through ecological processes) which make a major contribution to the overall functioning of those areas.*
 7. **Threat:** *The area supports an indigenous species or community of species which is threatened within the ecological district or ecological region or threatened nationally.*
 8. **Migratory Habitat:** *The area is important as habitat for significant migratory species or for feeding, breeding or other vulnerable stages of indigenous species, including indigenous freshwater fish.*
 9. **Scientific or Cultural Value:** *The area is a scientific reference area, is listed as a geopreservation site, or has significant amenity value.*

- 4.8.7.5. *Using the significance criteria identified above as a guideline for forming a schedule, Council will compile a schedule of significant natural areas.*
- 4.8.7.6. *In the interim the Council will make decisions on resource consent applications which recognise and provide for the protection of:*
1. *Significant indigenous vegetation and indigenous habitat;*
 2. *Natural values associated with riparian margins.*
- 4.8.7.7. *To protect areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna from inappropriate use, subdivision and development.*
- 4.8.7.8. *To encourage the retention of existing indigenous vegetation on the margins of waterways, wetlands and the coast and the enhancement of these areas through the use of indigenous vegetation where rehabilitation plantings are to be carried out.*
- 4.8.7.9. *For the purpose of Rule 7.9.8, the following criteria will be used for identifying Notable Trees:*
1. *Historic significance to the community*
 2. *Scientific or botanical importance*
 3. *Cultural or spiritual significance*
 4. *Recreational significance*
 5. *Landscape significance*
 6. *Functional value*
 7. *Size or age*

A tree may be notable for a combination of these factors or because it is outstanding in one respect.

4.8.8. Methods of Implementation

- 4.8.8.1. Rules and performance standards.
- 4.8.8.2. Land acquisition, land swaps, voluntary covenants, and applications to the Forest Heritage Fund and Nga Whenua Rahui.
- 4.8.8.3. Decisions on resource consent applications and imposition of conditions of consent.
- 4.8.8.4. Promotion of appropriate land management techniques.
- 4.8.8.5. Public education.

- 4.8.8.6. Identification of priority riparian margins, significant areas of indigenous vegetation and significant indigenous fauna on a GIS database freely accessible to the public, including sites or features identified as being of significance through the resource consent process.
- 4.8.8.7. Cost sharing of applications.
- 4.8.8.8. To recognise and provide for the protection of natural wetlands through plan rules, decisions on resource consent applications, and public education.

4.8.9. Explanation/Reasons

- 4.8.9.1. The District is comprised of large and varied habitat. Many of these areas have significant wildlife values and represent unique vegetation associations.
- 4.8.9.2. The objectives and policies outlined above ensure that these values are taken into account when considering resource consent applications. This is particularly important when considering the effects of activities located adjacent to significant natural areas managed by the Department of Conservation and also for habitats and natural areas under-represented in the reserve system, for example wetlands.
- 4.8.9.3. The Council has little direct management control over many natural areas. Primary management responsibility rests with the Department of Conservation. Any activity carried out on public conservation land requires a concession, licence, permit or lease from the Department. The process requires an assessment of effects on the environment. Given the Department's conservation/advocacy role and statutory responsibilities it is unlikely that any permission would be granted for an activity that was considered to generate significant adverse effects on ecosystems and natural habitats. A considerable proportion of natural areas has protected status under Department of Conservation management.
- 4.8.9.4. Except where there are very high conservation values present, a wide range of activities can be accommodated, with appropriate standards to ensure that the effects of these activities are avoided, remedied or mitigated.
- 4.8.9.5. There are a number of management tools which enable the protection of natural areas without resulting in an undue financial loss or burden to the land owner. These include private and public covenanting and purchase, for example via the Forest Heritage Trust and Nga Whenua Rahui, the provision of information on sites of importance, rates relief, and land swaps.
- 4.8.9.6. Land currently managed by the Department of Conservation includes stewardship land which may not have had its conservation value assessed.

- 4.8.9.7. Parts 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 include specific rules for the implementation of the policies and objectives stated above.

4.8.10. Intended Environmental Outcomes

- 4.8.10.1. Protection and improvement in the management of natural habitats and ecosystems.
- 4.8.10.2. Practical recognition of natural areas and their importance to the community as potential sources of revenue and income.
- 4.8.10.3. Protection of environmental quality and amenities.

4.8.11. Monitoring

- 4.8.11.1. A register will be kept of agreements to protect habitat sites outside of conservation areas to assess the use of non-statutory methods.
- 4.8.11.2. Liaison meetings will be held with the Department of Conservation concerning any questions of common concern regarding the management of natural habitat sites.
- 4.8.11.3. The Council may require, as a condition on any resource consent with the potential to detrimentally affect scheduled sites of significant natural vegetation or habitat, the provision of monitoring information such as photos to assess those sites and to provide information to use for other applications for resource consents for similar activities.

4.9. Landscapes And Natural Features

4.9.1. Key Issue

- 4.9.1.1. Protection of the outstanding landscape values and natural features of Buller District from the adverse effects of inappropriate subdivision, use and development.

- 4.9.2. The Buller District has a distinctive character which owes much to the landscape pattern and outstanding natural features. Rugged mountains grade to forested foothills, river valleys and terraces, down to the coast, with estuaries, rocky outcrops, cliffs and sandy beaches. The climate, topography and soils of the District mean the effects of inappropriate development may be quite pronounced or lack harmony with the surrounding environment. Outstanding natural features and landscapes represent an important tourist attraction and recreation asset and contribute to a sense of District identity. Particular features include karst areas, wetland systems, the Buller Gorge, the Paparoa and Karamea landscapes, the Buller coal measures and coastal dune systems.