



# Significant Natural Features Policy

March 2011



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## **1. Introduction**

Under the Resource Management Act 1991, it is a matter of national importance to protect areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant areas of indigenous fauna.

Matamata-Piako District Council (Council) has identified areas of significance in the district upon the request of Federated Farmers. This exercise has also identified ways in which the landowners of areas of significance can be assisted for retaining, and maintaining these areas for the purpose of protection.

The Operative Matamata-Piako District Plan 2005 (District Plan) has strategies, policies, and plans in place that are designed to protect and enhance the remaining indigenous flora of the district.

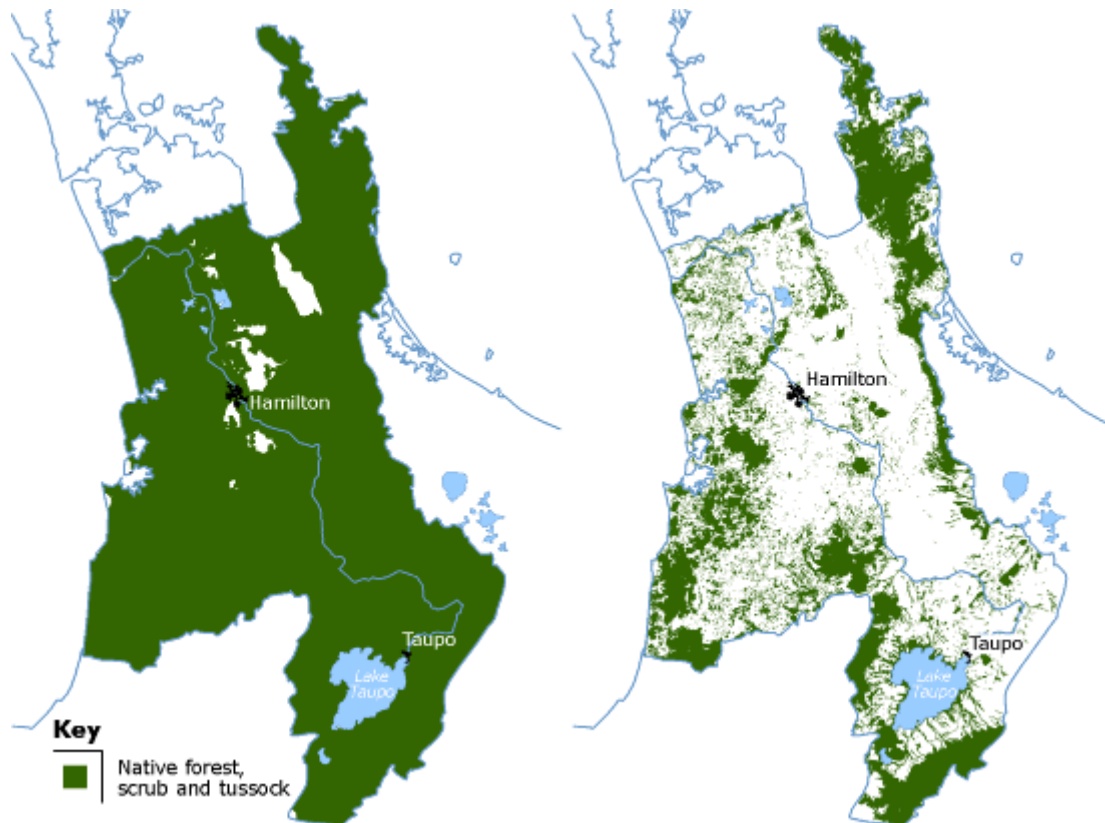
## **2. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to identify approaches that can be implemented by Council and private landowners to ensure the preservation of Significant Natural Features in the Matamata-Piako District. Along side the methods this statement identifies incentives that can be used to encourage the protection of these areas in perpetuity.

This policy will be reviewed and updated on a five (5) yearly basis. This policy was initially completed in December 2006 and has been reviewed in February 2011.

## **3. Vegetation Cover in the Matamata-Piako District**

In 1840, prior to land reclamation, much of the Matamata-Piako District was covered with indigenous vegetation. This vegetation flourished in all the bioclimatic zones from the lowlands to the coastal levels. The Maori people of the time burnt large areas of vegetation and when the European settlers arrived into the district, they found a lush, fertile land suitable for agriculture and farming purposes, and consequently the land was cleared for this purpose. In all, around 151,000 hectares of indigenous vegetation was removed. Current known estimates of the Matamata-Piako District has approximately 15% (25,062 hectares) native vegetation and wetland cover of which 13% is located on the Kaimai-Mamaku Ranges.



3.1. Figure 1 – Historic (1840 left) and current map of vegetation in the Waikato Region (Environment Waikato Website)

Department of Conservation hold around 20,262 hectares (or 11.5 percent) in their estate, 12.6 hectares is in Council owned reserve and 4,387.6 hectares lies in private ownership. Within Matamata-Piako the Kaimai Forest Park comprises an area of 14,670 hectares, and the Kopuatai Peat Dome an area of 5,313 hectares (approximately one third of the dome). Te Tapui Reserve comprises 2,382 hectares. There are 404 hectares within Matamata-Piako that are protected by covenants from the Queen Elizabeth II Trust, (State of the Environment 2010).

A further 4,000 hectares has been identified as possibly being significant in terms of the criteria set out in appendix 1 of the District Plan. These areas are currently not protected in any formal way and Council has undertaken evaluations to determine if they are significant in terms of the criteria set out in Appendix 1.



3.1.1. Figure 2 – View looking west from the Kaimai-Mamuku Ranges showing some vegetation cover left in the district (Photograph: B Bouda, Matamata-Piako District Council)

## 4. Statutory Requirements

### 4.1. Resource Management Act 1991

The main statutory requirement that requires the identification of significant natural features is the Resource Management Act 1991 (see Appendix 2). The purpose of this Act is “*to promote the sustainable management of natural and physical resources*”.

### 4.2. Matamata-Piako District Plan

Council, as a result of the Resource Management Act 1991 has introduced some policies, objectives and strategies, and rules into the District Plan, (See Appendix 3 of this document). These policies, objectives, strategies and rules detail how Council will work to ensure that areas of significance are protected.

In addition, the District Plan in Schedule 3 – Outstanding or Significant Natural Features and Trees and Other Notable Protected Items, identifies 272 scheduled sites, which include stands of trees, notable trees and individual trees as agreed by the landowner.

A list of 11 criteria contained within Appendix 1 of the Matamata Piako District Plan is used for establishing whether a site is significant or not (included as Appendix 1 in this report).

### 4.3. Other Statutory Legislation

Apart from the Resource Management Act 1991, there are other statutory plans and documents that are established to protect areas of significance include:

The New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy (2000)  
Waikato Regional Policy Statement  
Waikato Regional Plan  
Waikato Regional Pest Management Strategy  
Matamata-Piako Long-Term Council Community Plan 2009-19  
Waikato Conservancy Conservation Management Strategy (Department of Conservation)



Figure 3 – One of the few remnants remaining in the district, secondary indigenous forest dominated by mahoe, silver fern, kanuka and red mapou (Photograph: – B Bouda, Matamata-Piako District Council)

## 5. Significant Natural Features Evaluation

As part of the District Plan negotiations and requirements of the Resource Management Act 1991, Council has identified Significant Natural Areas of indigenous vegetation not already scheduled in the District Plan.

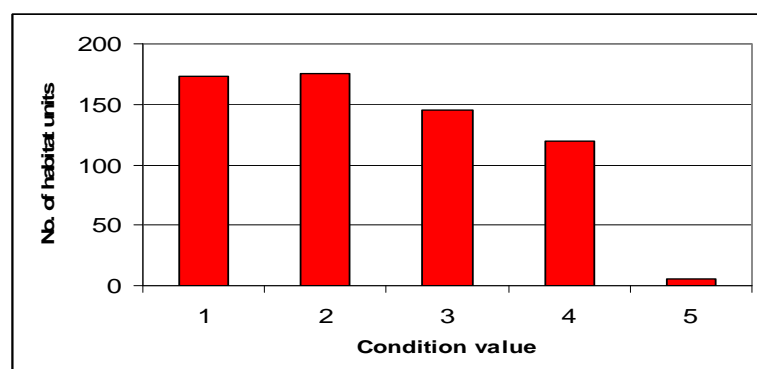
Investigation of potentially significant sites has been undertaken in collaboration with Waikato Regional Council staff, who agreed to offer financial assistance in the form of a consultant ecologist to work through our methodology for ensuring that the correct sites were identified.

The criteria that has been used to evaluate whether or not a site is significant or not is contained within Appendix 1 of the District Plan and as part of the Consent Order lodged with the Court, an additional criteria has been added which inserts the “Criteria for Determining Significant Indigenous Vegetation and Significant Habitats of Indigenous Fauna” as identified in the Regional Policy Statement.

Below is a summary table of all the sites evaluated under the Significant Natural Features Project:

	<b>Significant</b>	<b>Not Significant</b>	<b>Total</b>
Number of Sites	298	369	677
Hectares	721 ha	2390 ha	3111 ha
Percentage	23 %	77 %	100%

The sites identified as significant have been analysed further in terms of condition, where a score of 1 means that the significant natural feature is in poor condition and a score of 5 represents that the feature is in excellent condition. Overall, the average condition of all the sites assessed was identified as being 2.3, being poor to moderate. Only 6 sites were identified as being in excellent condition.



It is also noted that there were a number of properties where the owner would not grant permission for Council staff and the ecologist to undertake an ecological assessment on their property. Below is a table summarising the number of sites where the owner said no. An estimate has been made of potential significant natural features as to whether or not the site is likely to be significant: This has been done on the basis of the site overview at a distance.

	<b>Likely to be Significant</b>	<b>Unlikely to be Significant</b>	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>Total</b>
Number of Sites	62	36	2	100
Area (ha)	752.795 ha	114.56 ha		867.355 ha

## 6. Issues

### 6.1. Private Property Owner

Many landowners have retired pieces of land with indigenous vegetation on it as they see it as either non-productive land, or they see that it enhances the amenity value of their property. Most of these landowners have taken a

proactive approach in protecting their retired areas, with many fencing off the areas to exclude stock.

There are however, landowners in the district that do not see these areas of indigenous vegetation on their property as an asset. Instead, they see a liability that is taking up potentially valuable productive land and that removal of this vegetation will result in increased farming productivity.

The main issues that needs to be considered here is the level of assistance that can be provided to:

- help landowners who have voluntarily protected areas of significance
- encourage landowners, who do not want to protect these areas, to protect these areas
- ensure that these areas remain protected

The above issues can be achieved by:

- 1) A level of Council assistance to provide for the protection of the identified significant natural features
  - Council assistance may be required in part as an acknowledgement that landowners have voluntarily retired sections of their land for conservation purposes
  - Council assistance can include:
    - rates remissions on the retired pieces of land
    - providing the ability for resource consent applications to be made to create a bonus protection lot<sup>1</sup>
    - providing an internal 'conservation' grant which landowners with areas of significant natural features can apply for
    - Council applying to central government organisations for funding on behalf of landowners, e.g. Biodiversity Condition and Advise Funds
- 2) Ensuring that all landowners of significant natural features have access to Council assistance
  - Landowners of significant natural features all have different requirements for Council's assistance and/or funding, from no assistance to full assistance. This needs to be recognised to ensure that there is no discrimination to landowners who require little assistance to those that require full assistance.
- 3) Management protection requirements for identified significant natural features
  - Management protection is required to ensure that the future sustainability and viability of the sites are maintained and enhanced

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<sup>1</sup> A bonus protection lot is already provided for in the District Plan, subject to conditions, where there is an identified significant feature registered in the Plan. One bonus protection lot of a minimum of 2500m<sup>2</sup> may be created from the parent lot.

- Management protection looks at all aspects of protecting the site including:
    - fencing
    - the removal of invasive weeds e.g. tradescantia (Wandering Jew)
    - the eradication of animal pests (e.g. possums)
    - providing eco-sourced native plants for restoration planting
- 4) A schedule of sites that are significant needs to be incorporated into a 'stand alone' register. This register will be completed in 2011.

## 6.2. Council Owned Land

Council administers around 12.6 hectares of native bush reserve. In addition to this area, it has approximately 82 hectares of esplanade reserves, some of which are planted in natives, planted in exotics, or have no planting at all. The main purpose of these esplanade reserves is for the protection of the stream, its environment and to enhance water quality.

Council must be seen as at the forefront in the protection of significant natural features. Council will commit, where appropriate, to protect areas of significant natural features under its control in perpetuity. The method used to protect areas identified as significant will be undertaken on a case by case basis.

## 6.3. Schedule of Sites

All sites that have been identified as significant in terms of the criteria set out in the District Plan, and all future sites, will be identified in a register.

### 6.3.1. Register of Significant Natural Features

This register will be in addition to Schedule 3 of the District Plan, and will contain all sites that have been identified as significant in terms of the criteria set out in the District Plan. District Plan rules regarding significant natural features will apply to these sites. A superimposed GIS layer within Council's GIS system has been developed to identify all sites identified as significant and insignificant. This system has a direct linkage to the evaluation information undertaken as part of the site visits.

The register will be based on Schedule 3 of the District Plan and existing assessments of significant natural features in the district. It will provide details of the location, (GPS location if available), legal description, and type of vegetation present, (see Appendix 2).

## 7. Incentive Alternatives

Incentives assist land owners to protect their significant natural features and these are an important part in ensuring that the land is protected in perpetuity. Many incentives already exist for landowners of protected sites. Incentives will be made available to landowners whom have their site formally registered as either:

- an area scheduled in either Schedule 3 of the District Plan or as part of the register of Significant Natural Features; and/or
- an area that has any other type of formal protection method in place (e.g. Queen Elizabeth II covenant on the title)

### **7.1. Rates Remissions**

Rates remission is available to landowners who have significant natural features on their property, which are formally registered as outlined above. Currently rates remission is calculated using the below formula:

Formula: Total Rates x % SNF area of property = Rates remission

Note: A Rates Remission Policy is outlined in volume two of the Long Term Council Community Plan. This policy is required to provide the legislative authority to grant rates remissions under the terms and conditions contained in Council's Significant Natural Features Policy.

### **7.2. Bonus Protection Lots**

Bonus protection lots are already made available to land owners who have an area or areas of significant indigenous vegetation on their property. This allows a landowner to create one bonus protection lot of a minimum of 2500m<sup>2</sup> from the parent lot. The criteria used for this type of application are detailed in the Matamata-Piako District Plan.

### **7.3. Fencing**

Fencing is determined to be an absolute priority in the protection of significant natural features as fencing prohibits stock from entering the area and causing sometimes irreversible damage to the understorey of the site. Therefore, an incentive to encourage private landowners to protect areas identified as significant, would be to assist them with the cost of fencing to exclude stock.

### **7.4. Weed Control, Pest Control and Restoration Planting**

Weeds can prohibit new growth in the understorey by creating a 'blanket' through which light may not be able to penetrate, therefore stalling growth. Weeds can also cause damage to mature trees by climbing up them and effectively suffocating them. Weeds can spread at extreme rates, and new weeds can be introduced into an area by way of transportation on clothing, stock or birds.

There are many pests that can cause damage to existing mature vegetation and to new growth. Pests can vary from domestic animals to feral animals. Sites may never be pest free, but reducing the likelihood and the numbers can help a site to survive in the future.

Planting eco-sourced vegetation can turn a relatively sparse site into a vibrant ecosystem. Plants need to be eco-sourced as they have been adapted to the climate that they will be planted in. Restoration planting is only viable if the area is protected from stock and relatively free from weeds.

Assisting with the cost of plant restoration, weed and pest control could be another incentive to encourage landowners to protect and preserve the significant land areas.

## **7.5. Crown, National and Local Organisation Funding**

Council will endeavor, when requested, to assist landowners who decide to apply for funding from an organisation, on behalf of the community. This is only feasible when a group of individuals or a community group collectively approaches Council and identifies that they require funding for enhancement and/or protection of their identified area of significance.

Council will work with individual community members in their personal application for funding from any Crown or national based organisations for the protection of significant natural vegetation and/or significant indigenous fauna.

These are examples of funding that can be applied for:

- Biodiversity Condition and Advice Fund – Twice yearly funding round of which funding is available for information, advice and assistance for the protection of New Zealand's indigenous vegetation.
- Trust Waikato – Quarterly funding rounds for projects of benefit to the people of the Greater Waikato.
- Lottery Environment and Heritage – Three funding rounds per annum whereby financial assistance is made available for the purpose of promotion, protection and conservation of New Zealand's natural, physical and cultural heritage.
- WWF New Zealand - Habitat Protection Fund – Two funding rounds per annum to encourage and promote the conservation of New Zealand's natural resources and environment.
- James Sharon Watson Conservation Trust – Yearly funding round of which funding is made available for the conservation of flora, fauna, and natural features in New Zealand.
- Regional Council Funding - Environment Waikato's Environmental Initiatives Fund provides one-off grants to projects, which directly enhance and/or benefit the environment or provide environmental education.

## **7.6. Advice**

It is recognised that not all landowners who have a significant natural feature on their property require funding to protect these areas. Many landowners have already undertaken protection of the site from fencing, excluding stock to weed control. Council will provide advice or refer the appropriate specialist to any landowner who seeks advice from Council on protecting their significant natural feature. Carbon Credits is a good example where Council

can provide basic information and direct land owners to the correct agencies for further advice.

## 8. Estimated Costs of Incentives

Initial costs for the protection of areas identified as significant were obtained from the information that was noted during the site evaluations. These estimated costs may change as more sites are evaluated in the future, or as costs (e.g. fencing materials, pest control, labour) change with time.

### 8.1. Rates Remission

Based on 55% of sites being significant and qualifying for a rate remission, the following has been calculated:

Approximately \$40,400 per year (Total Rates x % SNF area of property = Rates remission)

### 8.2. Bonus Protection Lots

This incentive method is already implemented within the District Plan, therefore no additional costs are foreseen.

### 8.3. Fencing

There are many different types of fencing standards to be included in this cost because of the topography of the sites themselves. Current estimates put the identified sites as 60% on hilly terrain, while 40% are on flat terrain. Of the identified sites, approximately 176 km will require some form of fencing as a management protection priority.

Estimated cost of fencing:

Hill Country (8 wire post and batten)

\$17.00/metre

Flat Country (1 electric)

\$3.00/metre

*Note: All estimates based on current data available*

*Fencing costs established as \$17.00 per metre of fence for hill country, (8-wire post and batten {2.5mm wire, No 1 round posts @ 4.5 metre spacing}) and \$3.00 per metre of fence for flat country, (1-electric wire),*

Using the figures above the following cost can be estimate on the sites already identified as being significant:

105600 m x \$17.00 = \$1,795,200 Hill Country

70400 m x \$3.00 = \$211,200 Flat Country

**TOTAL COST = \$2,006,400**

*Note: Above costs exclude boundary fencing for more than one landowner, but these are generally already fenced*

## 8.4. Weed Control, Pest Control and Restoration Planting

Costing for the weed control is not an exact science as it depends on the type of weed, the amount of weed, the proximity of the weed to waterways, and the strength of the herbicide needed to control the weed, whether contractors are needed to apply the herbicide, which in turn has many other factors that can determine the price per hectare.

It has been estimated that approximately 55% of the land deemed significant will require weed control. Using the above estimate there has been 721 ha which has been deemed significant, then 396.55 ha needs potential weed control.

A conservative estimate would put the cost of weed control at about \$250 per hectare. Therefore the total cost of weed control over all areas identified as being significant is estimated to be \$180,250.

### Pest Control

Currently approximately 14% of sites deemed as significant have potential animal pests on them. This figure is not accurate as people may have animal pests on their land without their knowledge. Costs in relation to pest control are unknown due to the areas involved, pests involved, and the type of control that is needed. Below is a table that outlines potential costs for pest control.

Animal	Cost	Area Covered	Set Up Costs	Maintenance Costs
Goat	\$270	9-20 ha depending on terrain and bush type		
Possums (bait stations)	\$50-60	1 ha	Bait Station \$11 Traps \$32-40	Low
Possums (ground control)	\$35-40	1 ha		High

### Restoration Planting

Determining the costs for this is an inaccurate process as it depends on the size of the area, the amount of vegetation required, spacing of trees etc. Although each tree will cost around \$3.50, with all trees needing to be eco-sourced to ensure the vegetation is conditioned to the Matamata-Piako region. Four different scenarios are outlined below:

Scenario	Eco-Sourced Plant Costs	Number per Hectare	Total Per Hectare
10 metre spacing per plant	\$3.50	100	\$350
5 metre spacing per plant	\$3.50	400	\$1,400
2 metre spacing per plant	\$3.50	2,500	\$8,750
1 metre spacing per plant	\$3.50	5,000	\$17,500

## **8.5. Crown, Regional and Local Organisation Funding**

These incentive methods are already available therefore the only additional costs would be for Council staff to be up skilled on each fund available and the processes that each entails.

## **8.6. Advice**

Similar to 8.5 above, the only additional cost would be up skilling Council staff on the other funds available and having time available to advise landowners.

## **9. Funding Alternatives**

### **9.1. Funding from Rates**

Funding to provide incentives for the preservation of Significant Natural Features could be provided from rates. Presently, under the LTCCP 2009-2019 Council has earmarked \$35,000 annually for natural heritage.

To alter the funds allocated for natural heritage through rates, an amendment can be carried out through the Annual Plan process. This alteration would be relatively inexpensive as it can be incorporated into the mandatory Annual Plan process.

### **9.2. Development and Financial Contributions**

An alternative to gaining funds through rates is to take a contribution pursuant to Section 198 of the Local Government Act 2002 or Section 108.9(c) of the Resource Management Act 1991 (in conjunction with Section 7 of the District Plan).

#### **9.2.1. Local Government Act 2002 (LGA 2002)**

Section 204 (1)(a) of the LGA 2002 states that a development contribution taken by a territorial authority must be used for, or towards the capital expenditure of reserves.....which may also include the development of a reserve. Clause (b) of Section 204(1) reiterates that any development contribution required shall not be used for maintaining reserves.

Section 205 (d)(iv) goes further to say that the development contribution received for reserve purposes may also be used by any person, to secure an appropriate interest in perpetuity in land for conservation purposes.

In accordance with the above statutory requirements, Council could only require development contributions under the LGA 2002 for the cost of fencing, as that is the only incentive that relates to capital expenditure.

Below is a summary for the last three years of the additional lots created over the entire district and the additional lots created within the rural zone only.

Total Additional Lots Created per year	2007 / 2008	2008 / 2009	2009 / 2010	Average
Entire District	355	254	142	250
Rural Zoned Lots	103	98	71	91

It is noted that there has been a reduction in the rate of growth over the last few years and these averages may not truly represent the trends for the next 10 years.

Below is a summary of the amount of development contributions that could be required based on the total fencing costs as stated above in Paragraph 8.3.

	Estimated total fencing costs	Average lots created over 10 years	Development Contribution payable per additional lot
Entire District	\$1,443,200	2500	\$577
Rural Zoned Lots	\$1,443,200	910	\$1586

Depending on the alternatives chosen, some interest cost may need to be included in the calculations if the fencing is to be carried out prior to the development contributions being received.

Additionally, to impose a development contribution under the LGA 2002, it would require Council to impose a development contribution for natural heritage under the 2012 LTCCP review which will reduce the processing costs. This would mean that no development contributions would be received by Council until 2012.

### 9.2.2. Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA 1991)

Section 108 (10) states that a financial contribution taken under the RMA 1991 may only be included as a condition of consent if (a) the condition is imposed in accordance with the purpose specified in the plan and (b) the level of contribution is determined in the manner described in the plan.

The costs of incentives recoverable under financial contributions are totally dependant on how and what is included in the District Plan. As a result, two different scenarios (using estimated total costs over 10 years of \$500,000 and \$2,000,000) are detailed below outlining potential financial contributions.

	Estimated total cost (10 years)	Average lots created over 10 years	Financial Contribution payable per additional lot
<b>Scenario 1</b>			
Entire District	\$500,000	2500	\$200
Rural Zoned Lots	\$500,000	910	\$549
<b>Scenario 2</b>			
Entire District	\$2,000,000	2500	\$800
Rural Zoned Lots	\$2,000,000	910	\$2198

Note:

The figures derived in the above tables are estimates based on funding a portion of the incentives and based on funding all incentives (rates remission, fencing, weed control, pest control, restoration planting etc).

In order to impose a financial contribution under the RMA 1991 the Council would need to initiate a plan change. This process can be a very time consuming process especially if it is appealed to the Environment Court. The cost associated with a plan change can be anywhere between \$20,000 and \$100,000.

## 10. Working Party Recommendation (2006)

### 10.1. Incentives

The working party recommends that the following incentives be offered to land owners who have significant natural features on their property as identified:

- Rates Remissions – **Option 1:** Remissions based on 100% of land value of the property - Formula: Total Rates x % SNF area of property = Rates remission (approximately \$40,400 per year)
- Fencing – to provide costs of new fencing up to 50% of each project.

The amount of rates remissions and fencing costs to be allocated shall equal the monetary value identified for Natural Heritage within the Annual Plan each year. This figure shall be amended in 2009 to include the additional funds collected from Development Contributions\*.

The working party also recommends that the Form and Criteria as contained within Appendix 6 and 7 of this report shall be adopted by Council to assist with the allocation of funds.

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\* Review note (2011): This 2006 recommendation was not implemented. Council will have the opportunity to include Significant Natural Features in the 2012 Long Term Plan Development Contributions Funding Policy if this is identified as Council's preference.

## **10.2. Funding**

The Working Party recommends that Council within every Annual Plan shall sets aside adequate funding for Natural Heritage to fund the incentives listed above. Additional, in 2009 the Working Party recommends that Council in its review of the LTCCP shall include a Significant Natural Features contribution within the Development Contribution Policy\*. The Significant Natural Feature Development Contribution shall be imposed on additional lots created within the entire district.

## **10.3. Implementation and Monitoring**

### **10.3.1. Implementation**

For every year that funding is made available for the protection of significant natural features, Council shall advertise the funding round, and it will be the responsibility of the landowner to apply for funding. Applications for funding will only be accepted in writing on an official application form. No verbal applications will be accepted.

Funding may also be available to community groups who seek assistance for projects that they are currently undertaking or are going to undertake. These groups need to provide Council with a summary of their project, and which needs to include the location of the project, objectives and anticipated outcomes of the project, how the grant is intended to be spent and how it is beneficial to the community.

Council will determine each application from either an individual or a community group on a case by case basis. Council will assess the application looking at the merits and any possible implications of the proposal and decide how much if any Council should contribute to the proposal.

Where Council provides funding for the protection of significant natural features on private land, a covenant or other appropriate legal protection documents shall be placed on the title of the property effectively protecting that area in perpetuity.

Council may decide instead of providing monetary funds, to provide services to protect the area in question. Council providing the services to protect the area will act as having provided funding to the landowner.

Council will decide on the level of assistance by considering the following factors:

- The ecological significance and size of the site, (determined using the criteria set out in the District Plan)
- The interconnectivity of the site to other areas of significance

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\* Review note (2011): This 2006 recommendation was not implemented. Council will have the opportunity to include Significant Natural Features in the 2012 Long Term Plan Development Contributions Funding Policy if this is identified as Council's preference.

- Landowners willingness to commit to long term preservation, including current and suggested legal mechanisms for the ongoing protection of the site, e.g. QE II
- The degree of biological diversity in the site, including both fauna and flora values
- The extent of community involvement in the area

### **10.3.2. Monitoring**

An officer of the Council should be appointed whose responsibility is to:

- ensure that once funding has been granted, that the landowner implements their strategies as outlined in their funding application
- ongoing liaison with scheduled land owners
- address any issues that a landowner may have in regards to their site
- provide a bi-annual newsletter detailing success stories, identifying any new threats and any other issue that may arise
- develop and implement a monitoring process which should include the following:
  - monitoring of each site at least once every five years to ensure site is being protected in perpetuity
  - annual letter or phone call by the monitoring officer to identify any issues
  - linkage with the State of Environment database to record progress

Any applicant that is successful in their bid to obtain funding shall agree that the Council appointed officer, with no less than 48 hours notification, is allowed on the land in question as part of the monitoring process to ensure that the funds allocated have been used for their intended purpose. Monitoring may happen more than once during the funding period dependant on circumstances of the application.

### **10.4. Access Rights**

While the Council has invested substantial funds to protect the significant natural features identified through this process, the land owner still maintains all access rights to each site.

### **10.5. Priorities for Protection**

It is a responsibility of Council and landowners under the Resource Management Act 1991, to protect all areas of significant indigenous features remaining in the district. Council shall endeavor to ensure that

all areas, identified or otherwise, are protected. Currently rules are established in the District Plan to ensure that this happens.

Council shall determine which areas are priorities if it is unable to meet all protection requirements. Priorities shall be established using the criteria outlined in Appendix 1 of this document and the rules and criteria pertained in the District Plan. This would ensure areas have a good representation of significant natural features with higher priorities given to those areas that have an eco-system or fauna values that is considered to be in relative decline in the appropriate ecological district.



Figure 5 – Kopuatai Peat Dome – The Kopuatai Peat Dome is the only true peat/dome/restaid bog remaining intact in New Zealand, and is the largest remaining freshwater wetland left in the North Island. It is the best example of its kind in New Zealand and is listed as a RAMSAR site - a wetland of international significance. (Photo: B. Bouda Matamata-Piako District Council)

## 10.6. Partnerships

In achieving the policies outlined in this policy statement, Council will need to continue to foster and promote partnerships with other environmental organisations in order to create synergies. These partnerships will allow more information and funding opportunities to be developed and passed onto landowners of significant natural features on their property. Council should act as a collective landowner representative in this respect and create ways to mutually benefit landowners.

## **10.7. Other Matters**

### Peat land – Piako Road

The working group had mixed views on the above issue and believed that issues surrounding this area extending outside the parameters of this project. However, the working group recommends that Council lobby to the Waikato Regional Council to provide funding.

## **10.8. Council Resolution (2006)**

This policy was taken with an accompanying report to Council in December 2006, whereby the following resolution was passed:

That:

1. the information be received.
2. a) Matamata-Piako District Council consider applications for protecting Significant Natural Features that have been identified through a formal assessment process.  
b) a total of \$35,000.00 per year is available for assistance.  
c) priority be given to rate remissions.  
d) approvals be conditional on appropriate legal instruments as identified by the Working Party.

## **11. Policy Review (February 2011)**

This policy is to be reviewed on a five yearly basis. A review was undertaken in February 2011 and minor amendments have been made to update this document. The review of both the policy and of the funding rounds undertaken to date has also resulted in the following additions to this policy:

### **11.1. Funding Round Application Period**

Each annual funding round will occur prior to the start of the financial year that funding is to be granted within. This will allow successful applicants to be contacted early within the year, allowing them the maximum period of time to complete their approved project and claim their funding within that financial year.

### **11.2. Carry Forward of Funds**

Funding for successful applicants to undertake projects will be carried forward by Council in cases where the projects are not completed and / or the site is not formally protected in perpetuity within the same year funding was granted.

### **11.3. Project Timeframes**

Successful applicants will be required to commence their project and make reasonable progress within two years of being notified their application was successful, unless alternative agreements have been made in writing. Council has the option of withdrawing funding (by way of Council resolution) if the successful applicant has not commenced the project within this timeframe.

Through this policy, Council is encouraging landowners to undertake physical works to improve the condition of significant natural features as soon as is practical.

## **Appendix 1 – District Plan Criteria**

### **5 Significant Natural Features**

Significant natural features in the district are assessed using eleven criteria:

- i. Representativeness - examples of the characteristic communities within relevant land systems in ecological districts.
- ii. Diversity and pattern. The diversity of ecological and physical features, and the patterns that exist within the area under consideration.
- iii. Rarity and special features. Communities or species rare or comprising special features.
- iv. Naturalness. Most mainland ecosystems are modified but the degree of naturalness is an important consideration.
- v. Ecological viability. The inherent viability of the area to maintain itself in the long term.
- vi. Size and shape. Large areas with compact shape are preferable to small areas; often there is no choice though as only small remnants may remain.
- vii. Buffering and surrounding landscape. Buffering is the degree of protection provided by the surrounding landscape.
- viii. Fragility and threat. The actual or potential threats that an area may be exposed to and the vulnerability of an area to threats or other influences.
- ix. Fauna values. The fauna known to be present, or recorded during the survey.
- x. Management (protection) requirements.
- xi. Any one or more of the “Criteria for Determining Significant Indigenous Vegetation and Significant Habitats of Indigenous Fauna” as identified in the Regional Policy Statement.



## Appendix 2 – Resource Management Act 1991 Requirements

### 5 Purpose

1. *The Purpose of this Act is to promote the sustainable management of natural and physical resources*
2. *In this Act, “sustainable management” means managing the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources in a way, or at a rate, which enables people and communities to provide for their social, economic, and cultural wellbeing and for their health and safety while –*
  - (a) Sustaining the potential of natural and physical resources (excluding minerals) to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations; and*
  - (b) Safeguarding the life-supporting capacity of air, water, soil, and ecosystems; and*
  - (c) Avoiding, remedying, or mitigating any adverse effects of activities on the environment.*

### 6 Matters of national importance

*In achieving the purpose of this Act, all persons exercising functions and powers under it, in relation to managing the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources, shall recognise and provide for the following matters of national importance:*

- (b) The protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development;*
- (c) The protection of areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna;*
- (e) The relationship of Maori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral lands, water, sites, waahi tapu, and other taonga.*

### 7 Other matters

*In achieving the purpose of this Act, all persons exercising functions and powers under it, in relation to managing the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources, shall have particular regard to –*

- (b) The efficient use and development of natural and physical resources;*
- (c) The maintenance and enhancement of amenity values;*
- (f) Maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the environment;*
- (g) Any finite characteristics of natural and physical resources*



## **Appendix 3 – Matamata-Piako District Plan Requirements**

### **Issues Objectives and Policies**

#### **3.1.2 Natural Environment and Heritage**

##### **3.1.2.1 Landscape Character**

*Objective 1 - To retain and enhance the varied landscape qualities of the District*

*Objective 2 - To recognise the community desire to return areas in exotic vegetation in the Kaitiaki Zone within the Kaimai Ranges to indigenous cover*

*Policy 1 - The scale, location and design of buildings, structures and activities in significant landscape character units of the District should:*

*preserve the elements which contribute to its natural character*

*-not detract from the amenity values of the landscape.*

*Policy 2 - Where a resource consent concerning exotic vegetation is required in the Kaitiaki Zone, Council will consult with the community under the Local Government Act 2002 about the methods of achieving objectives 1 and 2 including the purchase of land in accordance with section 13.3.6.*

*Strategic Policy 1 - Council will enhance the general landscape of the District by implementing a tree planting programme.*

*Strategic Policy 2 - Council will encourage landowners to plant trees which reflect the native character of the ecological district.*

##### **3.2.1.2 Natural Environment**

*Objective 1 - To protect and enhance the natural resources within the District that are valued for their intrinsic, scientific, educational and recreational values.*

*Policy 1 - Recreational use of wetlands and bush and the surface of rivers and streams will be allowed where such use is consistent with the conservation objectives of that area. Council may exclude access to some areas of high ecological quality.*

*Policy 2 - To avoid, remedy or mitigate the adverse effects of activities that have the potential to compromise, damage or destroy significant areas of indigenous vegetation and habitats of indigenous fauna.*

*Policy 3 - Outstanding natural features, areas of indigenous vegetation or habitats of indigenous fauna are to be permanently protected at the time of subdivision, use and development.*

*Policy 4 - To maintain and enhance ecosystems with their essential values and qualities.*

*Strategic Policy 1 - Council will encourage landowners to permanently protect natural features, trees and vegetation provisions.*

*Strategic Policy 2 - To encourage a “conservation” education programme in conjunction with other agencies for targeted groups such as farmers, schools, tangata whenua. This programme may be developed in consultation with these groups.*

*Strategic Policy 3 - Council may, where it considers necessary acquire land to protect threatened outstanding natural features.*

*Strategic Policy 4 - Council will advocate and promote the voluntary protection of individual trees or stands of trees.*

*Strategic Policy 5 - Council will advocate that the Regional Council investigate the hydrological dynamics of the Kopuatai Peat Dome with a view to reviewing catchment policies on drainage, water quality and erosion control where necessary.*

*Strategic Policy 6 - Council will actively support the preparation of a management plan for the Kopuatai Peat Dome and land uses in the vicinity*



## **Rules**

### **10.2.2 Scheduled Trees Or Any Trees Within The Te Aroha Character Area in Schedule 3 excluding understorey and regrowth of vegetation in a plantation forest**

*Minor trimming, pruning or maintenance of any tree listed in Schedule 3 undertaken by hand operated clippers, in accordance with accepted arboricultural practice is permitted.*

*Any trimming, pruning or maintenance of a scheduled tree (including roots) specified in Schedule 3 not otherwise permitted is a discretionary activity*

*Any works or activity which is proposed within the dripline of any scheduled tree or which may impact on the root system of the tree is a discretionary activity.*

*Removal of any scheduled tree is non complying (excluding those that are dead, dying or terminally damaged by disease or natural cause).*

There is also a rule in the District Plan that is there to protect areas of unscheduled significant natural features, and that rule states:

### **10.2.5 Unscheduled Significant Natural Features**

*Damage, alteration or destruction of any significant indigenous vegetation or habitat or indigenous fauna meeting any one of the criteria of Appendix 1, Clause 5 (i) or (ix), this is identified as a discretionary activity.*

Others rule in the District Plan which is designed to protect our natural environment is

### **1.2.2 Development Suitability**

#### *(vii) Protection of Scheduled Significant Items*

*Council shall require the legal protection in perpetuity of any scheduled significant item or feature with the exception of Scheduled Item 213 of Schedule 3, as a condition of resource consent. Scheduled significant items are listed in Schedules 1, 2 and 3.*

- a) Council shall require that legal boundaries are located in a position that does not impair or destroy the integrity of the scheduled significant-item.*
- b) Suitably qualified persons shall, be engaged, if necessary, to determine the boundaries or significance of such items.*
- c) Any such required protective measures shall be taken into account when addressing the Development Contribution for reserves that would otherwise apply. (See Section 7, Development Contributions).*

#### *(viii) Protection of Other Items*

*Council may require, as a condition of subdivision or resource consent, the legal protection in perpetuity of a significant feature that is found to exist on the property, or the sustainable management of vegetation resources of indigenous or landscape value. Provided that this rule shall not apply to Scheduled Item 213 of Schedule 3 and where approval has otherwise been given for use of archaeological sites from the Historic Places Trust. Evaluation shall be undertaken in accordance with the criteria in APPENDIX I. The feature/area must be fully described and intrinsic value ranked alongside other similar features. Any protective measures shall be taken into account when assessing the financial contribution for reserves that would otherwise apply. (See Development Contributions , Section 7).*

*Council may require that legal boundaries are located in a position that does not impair or destroy the integrity of the significant feature found to exist on the property.*

### **13.3.2 Annual Plan**



*The Annual Plan may include, but is not necessarily limited to:*

*Providing for the protection, maintenance and enhancement of scheduled significant features, trees and landscapes.*

*Providing for education programmes which promote the sustainable use of resources including heritage and natural environment resources.*

*Providing professional advice to property owners on tree matters.*

*Providing financial assistance and other incentives to encourage the voluntary protection of wetlands and wetland margins.*

*Liaising with DOC, Fish & Game Council and WRC with a view towards the identification of appropriate wildlife corridors.*

*Providing financial assistance for resource consent applications as notified in terms of section 150 of the Local Government Act 2002.*

### **13.3.7 Land Purchase**

*Where subdivision does not occur Council may be pro-active in obtaining either esplanade reserves or access strips in the following circumstances and as budgetary opportunities allow:*

*Where a potentially continuous stretch of the esplanade reserves network is not continuous due to a small number of isolated areas not included in the network by some other means.*

*Where access to an important recreation or conservation area is warranted.*

*Where subdivision of an area appears complete and, unless access is negotiated, a continuous esplanade reserves network would not be available.*

*Council recognises the community desire to have the area defined as Kaitiaki Zone within the Kaimai Ranges returned to its natural native afforested state for landscape values. In recognition of this Council may acquire by agreement land in this zone for this purpose in accordance with section 86 of the Resource Management Act*

### **13.3.9 Landcare Plans**

*Where development is undertaken in accordance with a Landcare Plan adopted for the property and recorded on the title, the property may be eligible to apply for Council grants to complete conservation planting and protective fencing of such areas. Council may fund this through the Annual Plan.*

### **13.4 Department of Conservation**

*Significant areas of the District lie within the Conservation Estate. The Council will liaise with the Department of Conservation in the utilisation of this resource to achieve the best possible outcome.*

*Methods of doing this may include, but are not necessarily limited to:*

- *Reserves Management Plans;*
- *Conservation Plans.*

*A Management Plan for the Kopuatai Peat Dome should be developed as it is considered that 20m is insufficient to protect the natural values of it. The plan is to be prepared in conjunction with the Regional Council, the Department of Conservation and shall recognise sustainable management practice of land around the Dome and the effects on it.*



## **Appendix 4 - Application Form for Grant**

*Appendix 4 'Application Form for Grant' has been removed, as the form was out of date.*

Current forms can be collected from any Council office or downloaded from <http://www.mpdc.govt.nz/our-community/significant-natural-features-funding.html>



## Appendix 5 – Assessment Criteria for Grant

# Matamata-Piako Significant Natural Features Grant Assessment Criteria

### General

The Matamata-Piako Significant Natural Features Grant is a contestable fund of \$35,000 per year and is administered by the Matamata-Piako District Council. The purpose of this fund is to encourage and assist landowners and members of the community to protect, manage and enhance the significant natural features in the District. These significant natural features include but not necessarily limited to:

- Stands of native trees
- Areas of native bush
- Wetlands

### Funding

This fund will give preference to those sites that are either:

- Already protected in perpetuity (these include QEII Covenants, listed under Schedule 3 – Outstanding Significant Natural Features and Trees and Other Protected Items, or any other formal protection method); preference will be given to those areas that have some form of formal protection.
- Identified as significant through an ecological assessment of the site, (undertaken by qualified ecologist and ecological assessment to be provided).

Other sites may be considered where the funds allocated do not fully subscribe to funds available. In this instance, details of how protection of this area will benefit the community must be provided. Priority will be given to habitats of Regional or National Significance by meeting one or more of the criteria in paragraph 5 (XI) of Appendix 1 of the District Plan.

All areas for funding **must** be located with the Matamata-Piako District Boundary. Any area or part area outside the boundary will be ineligible for funding.

There will only be one funding round per year and Council will fund up to 50% of the projects total costs.

**Please note:** Where funding is granted by the Council, the land owner **must** register a covenant or other appropriate legal instrument on the title to protect the significant natural feature in perpetuity.

### Criteria for Assessment

The following criteria will be used to assess the application, and in some instances, a visit to the site may be warranted.

- Appendix 1 of the Matamata-Piako District Plan;



- The degree to which the work improves, enhances, benefits, protects or reinstates indigenous natural resources;
- Evidence of landowners future commitment to the project, the long term benefit, including the future management protection of the site (site management plan detailing present and future aspirations);
- The level of ecological benefits;

### **Further Information**

In each financial year (July to June) there will be one funding round. The funding round is open to all residents/ratepayers and groups of the Matamata-Piako District and will be advertised through the local papers as a public notice. Public agencies such as DoC, Environment Waikato, LINZ etc are excluded from applying to the funds. Preference for funding will be given to those applications that meet the criteria stated above. The level of community involvement with a site may in some instances be used as further criteria for assessment of funding allocation.

The total amount available to an application is solely at the discretion of the panel assessing the application. The funds will be allocated on completion of the project.

Council may, to any site that has been successful in its application, require that area to be formally protected.

The funds cannot be used for:

- Work that there is a legal obligation to do;
- Compensation for work already commenced;
- Work for financial gain to the landowner/occupant;
- Any resource or building consent fees as a result of the proposed activity;
- Costs for the preparing and lodging of your application;
- Debt servicing.

If the applicant breaches any of these conditions, Council will require that either the full or a determined partial amount of the funds provided be refunded.

Any exceptions to the Significant Natural Features Grant Assessment Criteria will require resolution from Council.

If you are GST registered, please do not include GST in your costs

### **How To Apply**

Complete the application form and supply all necessary documents that support your application to:

Community Development  
Matamata-Piako District Council  
PO Box 266  
Te Aroha



## Appendix 6 – Members of the SNA Working Party

Willie Shaw	Wildland Consultants
Jenny Lux	Wildland Consultants
Tim Johnston	MPDC Councillor
Leonie Tisch	MPDC Councillor
John Harris	MPDC Councillor
Marius Radermeyer	Resource Management Consultant
Ivan Knyvett	Land owner / Matamata Federated Farmers
James Thomas	Land owner / Morrinsville Federated Farmers
Stuart King	Land Owner / Te Aroha Federated Farmers
Robin Reid	Land owner
Martin Nelson	Land owner / Te Aroha Federated Farmers
Matthew Vare	Department of Conservation
Martin Wallace	Environmental Futures Inc
Moira Cursey	Waikato Biodiversity Forum
Karen Denyer	Environment Waikato
Paula Rolfe	MPDC Community Development Manager
Brandon Bouda	MPDC Policy Planner (in part)
Nicki Farrow	MPDC Policy Planner (in part)
Ally Player	MPDC Community Policy Planner (in part)

