

4.4.3 HOW DO WE COMPARE?

The total historic extent of wetlands in New Zealand has recently been estimated to have been 2.4 million ha with the current extent of wetlands estimated to be 249,776 ha, or 10% of the former extent⁷⁸. Wetland loss has been greatest in the North Island, which now retains only 4.9% of its historic extent, with loss being greatest in the Auckland, Coromandel, East Cape, Manawatu, Hawke's Bay, Northland and Wellington biogeographic regions. Wetland cover has survived best on the West Coast of the South Island, on Stewart Island and in the Otago region (Taieri, Clutha and Otago Peninsula). A comparison of wetland loss within regional council boundaries has been made (Table 4.37).



Trout fishing.

4.5 PUBLIC ACCESS TO FRESH WATER

4.5.1 WHAT IS THE STATE OF PUBLIC ACCESS TO WATERWAYS?

(A) RECREATIONAL USE OF FRESH WATER

There is a wide range of recreational uses of fresh water. These include traditionally popular forms of water-based recreation such as swimming, fishing, boating and aesthetic appreciation from walking, sitting or having picnics alongside waterways. Recreational use of these resources occurs alongside, and sometimes competes, with other users for water such as agriculture and industry, community water supplies, hydroelectric power generation, the port and other infrastructure development.

A water recreation survey was conducted over the 2007-08 summer period by the Taranaki Regional Council. The survey was undertaken to

obtain up-to-date information on the recreational use of rivers, lakes and the coast in Taranaki, and the constraints if any for gaining access⁷⁹. The last region-wide water recreation survey was conducted by the Council's predecessor – the Taranaki Catchment Commission as part of the Taranaki Ring Plain Water Resources Survey in 1984.

A postal questionnaire was conducted with Taranaki residents, to gain a broad indication of people's access to, and use of, water resources. Observation counts were made at selected locations of the total number of people present at each location and what activities were being undertaken.

Respondents were asked what activities they undertook while visiting identified river or lake sites. These are outlined in Table 4.38. Walking, swimming and relaxing are the most popular activities at beaches and rivers. Scenic appreciation and having picnics are also popular. At rivers, fishing and whitebaiting are popular activities. A higher percentage of people engage in passive recreation at lakes, but more people in the region go to lakes to boat and water ski rather than fish, jog or kayak.

Table 4.38: Main reasons for visiting river or lake sites Dec 2007-Dec 2008.

River activity	% of respondents	Lake activity	% of respondents
walk	47.4	walk	42.8
swim	46.4	relax	38.9
relax	40.3	scenic	28.3
scenic	24.6	swim	25.6
picnic	24.2	picnic	20.0
fish	15.6	watch	13.3
whitebait	14.7	drive	12.8
watch	9.5	boat	11.7
boat	8.5	waterski	9.4
camp	8.5	fish	8.3
drive	8.1	jog	8.3
jog	5.2	kayak	8.3
hunt	4.3	jetski	8.3
waterski	3.8	camp	7.8
raft	2.8	hunt	1.7
kayak	2.8		

78 Ausseil, A; Gerbeaux, P; Chadderton, L; Stephens, T; Brown, D and Leathwick, J. 2008. *Wetland Ecosystems of National Importance for Biodiversity: Criteria, methods and candidate list of nationally important inland wetlands*. Prepared by Landcare Research for the Department of Conservation.

79 Taranaki Regional Council, 2008. *Recreational Use of Coast, Rivers and Lakes in Taranaki 2007-2008*.

Table 4.39: Main activities observed at 10 freshwater/estuarine locations.

Location	On beach/ river bank	sea swim	river swim	fishing	sail craft	power craft	dogs	other	average total users
Audrey Gale Park	35		17				2	9	52
Burgess Park	48		3						49
Lake Rataipiko	28		12	3		7		6	46
Lake Māngamāhoe	33			1				7	36
Everett Park	16		13	1				5	25
Te Henui Stream	17		3		4		3	4	23
Meeting of the Waters	14		9						23
Lake Rotomanu	17		2			3		3	20
Waingongoro River	9	3	6	6				8	19
Lake Rotorangi	21		8			6		4	17
Urenui River	14	6	5			2		4	16
Waiwhakaiho Mouth	8		3	7				2	16
Stony River	5		5						10
Lake Opunake	4		4			1		1	7
Pātea River, Stratford	7			2			1	2	6
Wai-iti beach	4								5
Lake Rotokare	6								4

The study also observed recreational use at freshwater (and coastal) sites around Taranaki. Table 4.39 illustrates the different activities observed at each of these sites, although it needs to be noted that activities observed at the various lakes were likely to be influenced by the closure of Lake Rotokare for the majority of the summer, as well as Lake Rataipiko and Lake Rotomanu for periods of time due to high bacteria counts. Boaters commented there was a noticeable increase in the number of boats and jetskis on other lakes over the summer period.

Based on figures supplied by Fish and Game Taranaki, an estimated 1% of the Taranaki population hold whole-season trout fishing licences. A 2001-02 survey of angling activity carried out by Fish and Game Taranaki estimated over 6,300 total angler days for the season, which was likely to be below average. In the 1994-95 survey the number of angling days was estimated at over 8,400 visits.



Whitebaiting.

The New Plymouth Canoe and Kayak Club estimated they had approximately 60 active whitewater kayakers, and 80 active sea kayakers regularly frequenting the waterways and coast.

Whitebaiting (from 15th August – 30th November) is a popular activity in Taranaki enjoyed by a large cross-section of the community from young children to the retired. Retired people make up a large proportion of this group and can be very passionate whitebaiters. During the 2007 season it was estimated that at peak times there were more than 50 people on the Waiwhakaiho River alone, and peak counts on one day from the Mohakatino River estuary down to the Waitōtara River would have totalled in excess of 1,000 whitebaiters. Even small streams such as the Katikara, Timaru, and Te Henui had significant use with peak counts of somewhere between 5 and 20 people⁸⁰.

The recreational use survey⁸¹, found 90% of respondents thought public access to such rivers and lakes was about right reflecting similar sentiments in a New Plymouth survey of New Plymouth residents⁸².

(B) PUBLIC WALKWAYS

Public access to and along rivers and lakes is often provided for by way of public roads, esplanade strips, esplanade reserves and access strips.

The Department of Conservation in the Taranaki area is responsible for 300 km of actively managed track assets, of which a large number provide access to waterways. The tracks cater predominantly for the short stop travelers, day visitors and back country adventures. The track assets comprise 8 km of short walks, 2 km of barrier free short walks, 43 km of walking tracks, 25 km of easy tramping tracks and 222 km of tramping tracks.

80 Fish and Game and DOC officer, pers com.

81 Taranaki Regional Council, 2008. *Recreational Use of Coast, Rivers and Lakes in Taranaki 2007-08*.

82 New Plymouth District Council, 2008. *New Plymouth District Council Community Survey February 2008*.



Waingongo River sign.

NO IDENTITY CRISES AT THESE STREAMS

Is that bridge spanning the Ngatoroiti Stream, or the Ngatoronui? The Mangamawhete or the Mangatengehu? With more than 300 named waterways running off Mount Taranaki and scores more flowing from the eastern hill country, there's plenty of scope for confusion.

But the four examples above, all on one rural road near Inglewood, are among 191 river and stream crossings named with Taranaki Regional Council signage.

The Council's stream signage programme began on the ring plain in 2002 and after its initial success it was expanded to sites further afield.

The programme serves a number of purposes beyond identifying waterways – as important as that can be to the perplexed traveller or temporarily confused local.

Besides the name of the waterway and the Taranaki Regional Council logo, each sign carries an unambiguous environmental message – “protect our streams”. Signs at significant trout fisheries also carry a silhouette of an angler.

The latter locations are decided in consultation with Fish and Game Taranaki, whose field officer Allen Stancliff sees significant benefits in raising public awareness of not only trout fisheries but the environment in general.

“In a place like Wiremu Road, which crosses a lot of streams coming off the mountain, I don't think a lot of the landowners had a clear picture of which stream was which until the signs went in,” he said. “The signs have done a lot to raise awareness of the different catchments.”

He says that while local anglers are likely to already be aware of the good fishing spots, the signs denoting trout fisheries are a good guide for visitors. “And locals who aren't into fishing are made aware that they have a trout fishery in their area – so they know a little bit more about the environment they live in.”

For the Council, the signs publicly highlight the fact that much of its core business lies in monitoring, protecting and enhancing freshwater quality – and the fact that the whole of Taranaki needs to play its part too.

Certain criteria must be met before signs are erected. These include:

- the river or stream is officially named (Taranaki has a large number of 'unnamed tributaries');
- the road has regional or district strategic importance;
- the river or stream has an important use or high environmental value; and
- the river or stream is not on a State Highway, where bridged waterways are generally sign-posted already.

Survey and maintenance of the stream signs were carried out in the summers of 2005-06 and 2007-08 and continue from time to time as necessary. The Council maintains an internal database for this purpose.

The three district councils in the region are also responsible for a number of walkways in the region many of which provide public access to Taranaki waterways. The New Plymouth, Stratford and South Taranaki district councils are responsible for a total of 23, 2 and 15 walkways



Carrington Walkway, Stratford.

respectively. Of these walkways, 20 are adjacent to rivers, streams and lakes in the region⁸³ (Figure 4.40).

People are encouraged to access fresh water via the Stony (Hangatahua) River, the Huatoki and the Te Henui walkways, and the Carrington walkway along the Pātea River in Stratford.

It is also evident that substantial lengths of the major rivers in the inland hill country have road reserves adjacent to them⁸⁴.

Of the 10 major lakes (more than 8 ha in size) in the Taranaki region, four are either within reserves or have esplanade reserves along their shores. The region's largest lake, Lake Rotorangi, formed by the damming of the Pātea River for hydroelectric power generation, has a 200 ha esplanade reserve around its edge.

There are very few situations where public access to and along streams, rivers and lakes is restricted because of existing structures or operations that present a potential risk to public safety. In these cases alternative access can be provided.

83 Taranaki Regional Council, 2007. *Regional Walkways and Cycleways Strategy for Taranaki*.
84 Taranaki Regional Council, 1996. *State of the Environment, Taranaki Region 1996*.

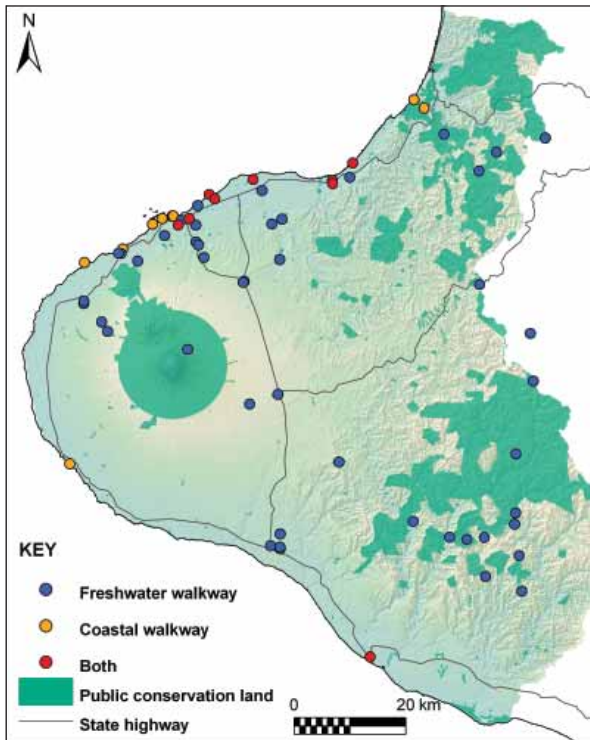


Figure 4.40: District council and Department of Conservation walkways that allow public access to or along rivers, streams, lakes or wetlands, or the coast.

The recreational use survey 2008⁸⁵, found only 10% of respondents had not been able to gain access to rivers, lakes or (parts of the coast) in Taranaki that they wanted to in the last year. The main reasons people could not gain access was because the access or entrance was closed, too difficult or too dangerous. Only 1% of respondents had been denied access by the landowner or occupier.

Approximately half of the beds of rivers, streams and lakes in Taranaki are in private ownership. This means that access to many rivers and lakes in the region occur largely through the goodwill and cooperation of landowners and often via the creation of esplanade strips and reserves. However, information on the number and location of esplanade reserves and strips that provide public access is limited.

(C) FORMAL PUBLIC ACCESS

Esplanade strips may be required by a rule in a district plan when land is subdivided or developed. Under the Resource Management Act, all subdivisions of allotments under 4 ha are required to have esplanade

reserves of 20 m width created along the edges of any rivers and lakes or the coast. This requirement may be waived or modified, by either a rule in a district plan or a resource consent. There is no default requirement for an esplanade reserve when allotments over 4 ha are subdivided. However, requirements may result from a rule in a plan.

Esplanade reserves or strips can be used to provide public access to and along rivers and lakes, and therefore the number and extent of esplanade reserves and strips provide a useful indicator of the level of public access to and along rivers and lakes in the region⁸⁶.

The 1996 *State of the Environment Report* reported that 122 esplanade reserves and strips were created in the 13-year period between 1978 and 1991⁸⁷. This was an average of 9.4 esplanade reserves for the region each year. Most were small and concentrated in urban and semi-urban areas.

The 2003 *State of the Environment Report* reported that in the six-year period between 1996 and 2002, 113 esplanade reserves and strips were created in Taranaki covering 111.9 ha⁸⁸. This equates to an average of 19 new esplanade reserves or strips each year and an average of 18.6 ha of improved access each year in Taranaki over the six-year period.

In the five-year period between 2003 and 2007, an additional 105 esplanade reserves and strips were created in Taranaki. This equated to an average of 21 new esplanade reserves and strips each year in Taranaki over that period.

The number of esplanade reserves and strips established per district in this period is summarised in Table 4.40.

Most esplanade reserves and strips established in Taranaki are adjacent to the region's priority rivers identified by the district councils, including: the Waiwhakaiho River, Mangorei and Huatoki streams in the New Plymouth District; the Waingongoro River, Pātea River and Kahouri Stream in the Stratford District; and the Tawhiti and Pūnehu streams in the South Taranaki District.

(D) INFORMAL ACCESS

Informal public access (i.e. where access is over privately-owned land) is also an important part of providing access to fresh water in Taranaki, although access is reliant upon the goodwill of adjacent landowners. Generally most private landowners are happy to allow people to cross their land as long as property rights are respected and permission is sought first. Fish and Game Taranaki has produced a pamphlet showing access points to popular fishing spots in the region. This information highlights the importance of getting landowner permission to cross private land.

Table 4.40: Number and area of esplanade reserves and strips created between 2002 and 2007.

District	Number of new esplanade strips and reserves created	Area of new esplanade strips and reserves (ha) created
New Plymouth District	94	87.2
Stratford District	1	1.2
South Taranaki District	10	N/A
Totals	105	N/A

Data: Supplied by the district councils. Information on the area of the esplanade strips and reserves is not readily available from the South Taranaki District Council.

85 Taranaki Regional Council, 2008. *Recreational Use of Coast, Rivers and Lakes in Taranaki 2007-2008*.

86 Barrett Fuller and Partners, February 1992. *Esplanade Reserves: The implications of the Resource Management Act for the Taranaki region*. Prepared for Taranaki Regional Council, New Plymouth District Council, Stratford District Council, South Taranaki District Council.

87 Taranaki Regional Council, 1996. *State of the Environment, Taranaki Region 1996*.

88 Taranaki Regional Council, 2003. *Taranaki – Our Place, Our Future. Report on the State of the Environment of the Taranaki Region*.



Planting day, Herekawe Walkway, New Plymouth.

EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP WALKS THE TALK

The Herekawe Walkway project in New Plymouth demonstrates the value of effective partnerships in improving both amenity values and environmental wellbeing.

In a combined effort involving the community, corporates and councils, an all-weather walkway has been formed along the Herekawe Stream from suburban Spotswood to Back Beach. The stream has been cleared of willows and weeds and bridged at two points, the quality of its waters is being protected and enhanced with 10,000 new streamside plants, and 1,500 m of new riparian fencing keeps stock out.

The project grew out of an initiative in 2003 by major industries operating in the Herekawe catchment – Dow AgroChemicals, Methanex and Shell Todd Oil Services – and the partnership has grown to include contractor AJ Cowley, which has donated land, and the Taranaki Regional Council, the New Plymouth District Council, the Taranaki Tree Trust and other groups.

Breadth is a feature of the partnership – for example, Motorua Primary School and New Plymouth Prison are among those to have provided plants for the project, which has also involved Conservation Corps and Community Service workers.

Most importantly though, enthusiastic public support has been evident on planting days and the project has the warm blessing of Ngāti Te Whiti hapū.

“It’s a perfect example of people coming together with a single goal,” said the Taranaki Tree Trust Chairman, Donald McIntyre.

Environmentally, the streamside planting will do much to enhance water quality, by filtering run-off, moderating peak flows, keeping water temperatures lower and promoting biodiversity.

Besides the amenity benefit of a clean and healthy stream, the walkway also offers locals an attractive and health-promoting “pathway to the sea” and a direct link to a potential future extension to New Plymouth’s popular coastal walkway.

The project’s amenity value is already recognised by real estate marketers, with “proximity to the Herekawe Walkway” noted in advertisements for houses being sold in the nearby area.

4.5.2 HOW IS PUBLIC ACCESS TO FRESH WATER MANAGED?

(A) REGIONAL POLICIES AND PLANS

The maintenance and enhancement of public access to and along rivers and lakes are matters of national importance under the Resource Management Act 1991.

The Regional Council has limited powers to provide public access to and along streams, rivers and lake beds where the adjoining land and riverbed are privately-owned. However, the *Proposed and Operative Regional Policy Statement for Taranaki* and the *Regional Fresh Water Plan for Taranaki* contain policies encouraging district councils to provide for public access in district plans, including the creation of esplanade reserves and strips. The plans contain objectives, policies and methods to maintain and enhance public access to streams, rivers and lakes. The *Regional Fresh Water Plan* also contains a list of rivers and streams (Appendix IA) for which access arrangements are desirable and appropriate because of their natural, ecological and amenity values.

(B) DISTRICT COUNCILS

All district plans in Taranaki provide for the creation of esplanade reserves and strips to ensure that public access to and along the region’s most important streams, rivers and lakes can be maintained and enhanced. Each district plan also retains discretion for councils to be able to waive a requirement.

The *New Plymouth District Plan* identifies “preferred esplanade reserves and strips” and “priority waterbodies”, these are areas of land that would link existing public access and to which the enhancement of public access is desirable. These areas require an esplanade reserve or strip to be set aside at the time of subdivision and development.

The *Stratford District Plan* provides for the creation of esplanade reserves (upon subdivision) and esplanade strips (as a condition of any land use consent) on land adjoining priority ring plain river catchments. These are in areas of more intensive land use.

The *South Taranaki District Plan* has a schedule of priority rivers for protection via esplanade reserves and strips at the time of subdivision and development.

In addition, district councils also maintain roads, tracks, paths, reserves and walkways that provide public access to and along fresh water, e.g. Carrington walkway in Stratford, Huatoki and Te Henui walkways in New Plymouth.

(C) REGIONAL WALKWAYS AND CYCLEWAYS STRATEGY

A *Regional Walkways and Cycleways Strategy for Taranaki* has been developed to promote walking and cycling activities in the region, including access to fresh water⁸⁹. The strategy lists current and potential routes that together would make up a network offering pedestrian and cycle access to the region's natural attractions, as well as population centres. The strategy aims to recognise and promote the leisure, recreational, commuter and tourism opportunities provided by walking and cycling.

(D) INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND ADVICE

Regional and district councils provide information and technical advice relating to the provision of public access when requested.

(E) WALKING ACCESS COMMISSION

Central Government is also investigating options for establishing a New Zealand Walking Access Commission to lead and co-ordinate the provision of public access to the outdoors especially around the coast,

and lakes, and along rivers. The Commission's responsibilities would include the provision of information about the location of existing public access, the provision of a code of responsible conduct for the guidance of the public and landholders in respect of recreational access to the outdoors, and the facilitation and funding of negotiations for new public access across private land. The implications of these activities for the Taranaki region will be assessed in due course once the Commission commences operation.

(F) SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

Progress in implementing regional objectives and policies on public access to rivers and lakes is summarised in Table 4.41.

4.5.3 HOW DO WE COMPARE?

New Zealanders have traditionally enjoyed good access to and along rivers and lakes throughout the country. The concept of the 'Queen's Chain' (introduced to New Zealand in 1841) was designed to protect in perpetuity, a 100-foot wide strip of public land alongside waterways. However, the Queen's Chain does not exist beside all water bodies because an increasing amount of land since the 1840s has become privately-owned. While it is often assumed that there is a right of public access to such areas for recreation and for cultural and spiritual purposes, this is not always the case, and is an issue encountered throughout New Zealand.

Table 4.41: Summary of Progress with regional objectives and policies relating to public access.

Issue	What do we want to achieve?	What are we doing about it?	Where are we at?
Maintaining and enhancing public access to and along rivers and lakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased formal public access to and along rivers and lakes. Avoidance, remedy or mitigation of adverse effects that may arise from public access to and along rivers and lakes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current and <i>Proposed Regional Policy Statement</i>, Regional plans and District plans contain provisions providing for public access. The <i>Regional Walkways and Cycleways Strategy for Taranaki</i> was prepared in 2007 -to enhance public access to and along rivers and lake margins and to increase awareness of walkways in the region. Advocating, when appropriate, for the establishment of public access to and along rivers, stream and lakes. Providing information and technical assistance to those wishing to carry out activities to enhance public access to and along rivers and lakes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 105 new esplanade reserves and strips established between 2002-2007. On average 21 new esplanade reserves and strips established each year over the five-year period, 2002-2007. No major constraints on public access have been highlighted in the past five years.

89 Taranaki Regional Council. 2007. *Regional Walkways and Cycleways Strategy for Taranaki*.