

2 ISSUES, OBJECTIVES: Rural Environment

2.1 OVERVIEW OF RURAL ENVIRONMENT RESOURCES

Horowhenua's rural environment encompasses a diverse range of resources and landscapes from the coast to the Tararua Ranges. There are three main land "types":

- Coastal sands and sand country
- Inland plains and river terraces
- Hill country and State Forest Park

2.1.1 Coastal Sand Country

Sand dune formations extend inland along the whole coastal plain. The soils closest to the coastline are light and the more inland soils are more stable. All soils are vulnerable to wind and water erosion particularly where they are exposed by the removal of surface vegetation. There are numerous areas of ecological significance including rivers, river mouths and estuaries, indigenous vegetation and coastal wetlands and lakes. The coastal plains are also home to a significant number of archaeological sites and sites of particular value to tangata whenua resulting from the historical pattern of settlement of the area. The landscape is distinctively coastal - being based on the rolling sand dune formations and general grazing land use. There are significant areas of commercial exotic forest plantations along the coast. Land is owned in a variety of allotment sizes and fencelines reflect historical ownership and management.

2.1.2 Inland Plains And River Terraces

The inland plains have a characteristic flat to gently rolling landform with river terraces. The soils are generally highly fertile sand and silt loams. Rivers and streams are active in shaping the landscape and land management practices are important in influencing susceptibility of the land to erosion. The overall landscape has a "green", farmed character reflecting the predominant grazing, cropping, and horticultural land use. There is a mix of large and small holding sizes reflected in the patchwork of paddocks and fencelines in the landscape. There are localised areas of remnant vegetation (native and exotic). Large waterways, like rivers, were of course used as highways over which tangata whenua travelled. They were also boundary markers between lwi and hapu where food gathering areas were clearly delineated so that all lwi members were able to access resources within their allotted area.

2.1.3 Hill Country

The Tararua State Forest Park is dominant in the whole District's landscape. Although it is not farmed as part of the rural environment, it is significant as the backdrop to the rural character of the District. The Ranges and foothills also provide a significant recreation resource for the District and Region. The hill country, at the foothills of the Ranges, are characterised by steep hills and steepland soils which are vulnerable to erosion by wind and water. There are areas of ecological importance scattered throughout the steeper country including stands of indigenous vegetation. Land use has historically been low to medium intensity stock grazing and property boundaries reflect the larger land holdings associated with this land use. There are substantial plantations of exotic forestry throughout the hill country which are maturing at different rates and new plantations are being added.

The hill country, like the Tararua Ranges and foothills, were areas of major mahinga kai and mahinga taonga. The Tararua Ranges and particularly its peaks, have major cultural significance to the identity associated with the tangata whenua.

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2.2 SIGNIFICANT RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ISSUES FOR THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT

Issue 5: The effect of inappropriate subdivision, use, and development on the availability of soils to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations.

Issue 6: Sustainable land management and the potentially adverse effects of inappropriate land management.

Issue 7: The characteristic amenities of the rural environment and the potential for them to be adversely affected by activities.

Issue 5: The effect of inappropriate subdivision, use, and development on the availability of soils to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations.

Parts of the Horowhenua District have particular qualities of highly fertile loam soils and climate which make them highly versatile and suitable for a diverse range of uses. The areas within New Zealand and within the Horowhenua District which have these highly versatile soils are, however, in relatively limited and finite supply. In the Horowhenua District, the soils which could be described as being the most versatile and having the greatest potential capability for a range of land uses are the sandy, silt, and stoney loams which make up about one third (or 38,981 hectares) of the rural land area.

Horowhenua has historically experienced strong growth in the subdivision and development of rural land. A 1994 Study demonstrates that this development has been concentrated on the most highly versatile soil areas. This has been particularly evident since the Horowhenua County Council through a District Scheme Change in August 1983 allowed for the creation of "stepping stone farm lots" (minimum area of 6000m²) and "dwelling house lots" (between 2000m² & 6000m²). Some of the consequences of that development have been:

- The development of buildings and access to sites which takes a certain amount of land out of the available supply of highly versatile soils;
- High levels of land fragmentation into small certificates of title forecloses land use options for present and future generations. A number of lots of different sizes enables reasonable use by a range of activities while maintaining a relatively constant pool of titles.
- Intensive "urbanisation" of rural land can have adverse effects on the natural character of the rural area.

The possible long term adverse effects of these historical and cultural trends on the availability of highly versatile soils for future generations is a significant cultural resource management issue for the District. Some fertile soils were previously wetlands which were, and remain, an important food and mahinga taonga source for tangata whenua. Whilst the issue is particularly acute for the highly versatile Land Use Capability (LUC) Class 1 and 2, it is also a concern for the less versatile land classes.

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OBJECTIVE 1:	To protect the long term sustainability of soils for a range of activities.
POLICY 1.1:	Manage the rate and location of subdivision of land by limiting the number of new certificates of title created on highly versatile soils to ensure the future availability of these soils are not compromised.
POLICY 1.2:	Ensure that allotments and developments intended for rural-residential, residential, and other non-farming activities do not adversely affect the soils in the balance area of the site.

Explanation and Principal Reasons

Based on the information held by Council in various background reports and studies on rural development, rural subdivision issues and options are a significant resource management issue for the Horowhenua District. As such rural development warrants its own issue, objectives and policies as detailed above, with associated methods for implementation.

In terms of effects, the issue is not rural subdivision per se. The adverse effects of concern stem from the subdivisional and consequent development of land. These adverse effects include:

- *the construction of dwellings and buildings causing soil compaction*
- *the increased sewage loading causing poor water quality*
- *the potential effects on underground aquifers*
- *the effects on amenity values*
- *the increased traffic on rural roads and inappropriately located vehicle entranceways*
- *the pressure from non-farming issues being placed on legitimate rural operations to either cease or modify spray drift, noise and odour.*

The significant issues stemming from the adverse effects mentioned above are:

- *changes to the amenity values and to the open character of the rural landscape*
- *the ability to supply potable water and absorb additional waste*
- *the effects on traffic flow*
- *the existence of relatively limited areas of soil types considered to have high potential productive capacity and the need to protect the full range of soil types for future generations*
- *the need to address the non-farming sensitivity problem.*

For the reasons discussed above, the objective and policies under Issue 1 target the highly versatile soils comprising (LUC) Class 1 and 2, as one of the resource management issues in the rural environment, along with sustainable land management in general, and managing the effects of activities in the rural environment. An evaluation of alternative options concluded that a mix of approaches would most effectively address the issue for the District. The policies and associated rules for rural subdivision and development are intended to ensure that it remains possible to continue to subdivide and develop in order to maintain a range of allotment sizes of sufficient size to accommodate a range of activities.

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METHODS FOR ISSUE/OBJECTIVE 1

District Plan

- The Plan will identify an area of "highly versatile soils" (being predominantly Land Use Capability (LUC) Class 1 and 2).
 - Rules will control the rate of subdivision permitted within this area of "highly versatile soils" in the following manner:
 - For certificates of title created before 1 August 1983**
 - (a) Having an area less than 4 hectares, a rule shall permit the subdivision and alteration of boundaries provided no additional certificates of title are thereby created.
 - (b) For titles between 4 and 10 hectares, a rule shall permit no more than 1 additional certificate of title to be created.
 - (c) For titles between 10 and 20 hectares, a rule shall permit no more than 2 additional titles to be carried; and
 - (d) For titles having greater than 20 hectares, a rule shall permit no more than 3 additional titles to be created.
 - For certificates of title created between 1 August 1983 and 1 August 1996**
 - (a) Having an area less than 7 hectares, a rule shall permit the subdivision and alteration of boundaries provided no additional certificates of title are thereby created.
 - (b) For titles between 7 and 10 hectares, a rule shall permit no more than 1 additional certificate of title to be created.
 - (c) For titles between 10 and 20 hectares, a rule shall permit no more than 2 additional titles to be carried.
 - (d) For titles having greater than 20 hectares, a rule shall permit no more than 3 additional titles to be created.
- (Rules are a fixed and certain method which can be applied consistently; Subdivision is the process which sets in train future development patterns; It is considered to be important to control subdivision.)

Issue 6: Sustainable land management and the potentially adverse effects of inappropriate land management.

Many of the District's soil resources are vulnerable to erosion simply because of their natural characteristics (e.g. light sandy soils or soils of the steep hill country). Land management practice is the key determinant of the long term stability and productive capability of soils. Inappropriate land management can cause accelerated erosion and loss of soil versatility. Examples include successive and uninterrupted cropping; vegetation clearance without suitable soil retention or water control

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measures. The issue is important both to the natural ecosystems which rely on sustained soil capability and to the District's rural economy.

OBJECTIVE 2:	Sustainable management of the soils of the District to enable their long term use for a range of purposes.
POLICY 2.1:	Ensure the adverse environmental effects of land management practices on the life-supporting capacity of soil are avoided, remedied or mitigated.
POLICY 2.2:	Promote land management practices which sustain the potential of soil resources to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations.

Explanation and Principal Reasons

Achievement of sustainable land management throughout the District is a high aim. Achievement will depend, in large measure, on voluntary change from traditional land use practices in the community. Control through the Plan, is not expected to be the means of achieving sustainable land management. Other agencies also play a part.

The Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council is the authority directly responsible for soil conservation and land disturbance matters. The District Council can, though, assist to influence land management practices in its role of managing the effects of land use activities. Other agencies including Federated Farmers, the Regional Council, Department of Conservation, and Fish and Game Council all work directly with land users to improve land management practice. The more direct initiatives of these other agencies are expected to be most effective in improving land management practice and soil sustainability over time. The Council intends, within the constraints of its jurisdiction, to assess and positively influence the significantly adverse effects of land use activities on soil capability and to work co-operatively with those agencies in promoting sustainable land management.

METHODS FOR ISSUE/OBJECTIVE 2

Education and Information

- Council will co-operate with land users and other agencies in generating and disseminating information on sustainable land management techniques.
- Council will encourage land users to use codes of practice and other good practice guidelines.

District Plan

- Grazing, production forestry, and other forms of cropping and horticulture are permitted activities in the rural environment.
- Intensive farming is a permitted activity subject to particular conditions concerning separation distances.
- Activities which require land use consent will be assessed for their impacts on long term soil versatility.

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Other Statutory Plans

- The Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council's Transitional Regional Plan, and soon to be re-notified, Land Plan will also control vegetation clearance and soil disturbance on vulnerable soils in the region.

Issue 7: The characteristic amenities of the rural environment and the potential for them to be adversely affected by activities.

The amenities which combine to give the rural environment its special character include:

- a predominantly open and "green" landscape
- abundant open space incorporating natural habitats
- overall low density of settlement and built development
- generally substantial separation between, and privacy for, dwellings and other buildings on properties
- generally fresh air with intermittent odours and smoke associated with seasonal rural activities, or some temporary activities.
- overall quiet daytime and night time noise conditions with intermittent louder noises associated with seasonal rural activities or some temporary activities.

The rural environment hosts a diverse range of activities spread throughout a large area. Activities include farming and harvesting, including forestry, associated residential activities, recreation activities, home occupations, and rural industries and transport activities.

The growth in numbers of rural-residential "lifestyle" properties within the rural environment has the potential to increase conflicts between rural activities (and their effects) and recent arrivals who hold aspirations for a totally quiet and passive environment. It is important to acknowledge that most rural activities need their rural location and that some effects must be expected in the rural environment. Dogs barking, stock noise, farm machinery noise, stock movements, burning, and spraying are all necessary and usual aspects of life in a rural area. The concern of the Council is to ensure that any adverse effects of rural activities are contained within reasonable "rural" levels to avoid compromising the health, safety, or amenities enjoyed in the rural environment.

Examples of adverse effects of activities that are of particular concern include:

- Close-density, urban-style residential settlement patterns
- Inadequate or inappropriate disposal of wastes
- Noise disturbance
- Offensive and unabated smell
- The careless and indiscriminate use of air sprays resulting in spray drift
- The effects of buildings, earthworks, and roads on areas of natural habitat and on the outstanding landscapes and natural features
- Shading caused by shelterbelts, plantations and buildings
- Encroachment into the privacy of rural dwellings
- Effects of additional traffic and new intersections/entrance ways on the safety of rural roads
- Inappropriate advertising signage which detracts from visual amenity or road safety

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OBJECTIVE 3:	The management of the effects of activities in the rural environment in a way that maintains or enhances environmental amenity and to enable people in communities to provide for their social economic and cultural well being and for their health and safety.
POLICY 3.1:	Enable the establishment and operation of activities which rely on a location in the rural environment provided they meet minimum environmental standards.
POLICY 3.2:	Require any activity which does not meet minimum standards to be considered as an application for land use consent in terms of the policies of this Plan relating to effects on the environment.
POLICY 3.3:	Ensure that all activities within the rural environment dispose of wastes in a manner that avoids, remedies or mitigates adverse effects.
POLICY 3.4:	Avoid, remedy or mitigate the impact of buildings on the rural landscape and maintain overall low building density and building height throughout the rural environment.
POLICY 3.5:	Maintain generous separation distances between residential buildings in the rural environment.
POLICY 3.6:	To maximise opportunities for privacy between residential buildings on properties in the rural environment.
POLICY 3.7:	Avoid, remedy, or mitigate any adverse environmental effects of shading of land, roads, or buildings caused by buildings, tree shelterbelts or plantations on adjacent properties.
POLICY 3.8:	Avoid, remedy or mitigate any adverse effects upon residential properties or road safety caused by lighting or glare from any source.
POLICY 3.9:	Avoid or remedy or mitigate, where necessary, any adverse odours likely to affect the amenity of residential properties or buildings.
POLICY 3.10:	Maintain separation distances between residential activities and effluent holding ponds and oxidation ponds so as to minimise adverse effects for both activities.
POLICY 3.11:	Maintain overall day and night time noise conditions at levels compatible with the amenity and activity present in the rural environment.
POLICY 3.12:	Ensure that effects of increased traffic or changed traffic type or change to road access do not compromise the safe and efficient operation of any road or adversely affect the safe and convenient movement of people on public roads.

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POLICY 3.13: Minimise the amount of advertising signage present in the rural landscape and minimise the impact of advertising signs which are not directly associated with activities undertaken in the immediate vicinity of the sign.

POLICY 3.14: Recognise the existence of the Levin Sewage Treatment Plant in Mako Mako Road as a legitimate activity adjoining the rural zone and protect it from the effects of reverse sensitivity.

Explanation and Principal Reasons

The Plan acknowledges that people and their activities are an important part of the rural environment. The Plan intends to enable the establishment and operation of activities and will specify minimum standards for their establishment and operation. The policies clearly identify the environmental qualities and amenities that are to be protected. Advertising is acknowledged as important to enterprise. Limits on the extent of advertising are intended to minimise impacts on the visual attractiveness of the rural landscape.

Habitable buildings within an 800 metre buffer of the Levin Sewage Treatment Plant, as shown on the district planning map, are controlled activities. This provision is necessary to protect the plant from the effects of reverse sensitivity. Reverse sensitivity is a term used to describe the effects of the existence of sensitive activities (in this case the sewage treatment plant) on other activities in their vicinity. (In this case, the use is allowed in the adjoining rural zone.) The concept recognises the justification for restraining the carrying out of those other activities to protect the treatment plant as a legitimate and ongoing activity in the vicinity. The restraint is limited to the control Council can exercise requiring, where appropriate, that resource consents be granted on the condition that they be subject to the restraint of a covenant being registered against the title of the land to be used for the controlled activity, to the effect that owners, lessees or successors entitled, acknowledge the presence of the sewage treatment plant in the vicinity and will not seek to constrain its continued lawful operation.

METHODS FOR ISSUE/OBJECTIVE 3

District Plan

- A rural zone will be identified in the planning maps.
- Rules will specify permitted activities and conditions and standards derived from the above policies.
- Rules will specify the resource consent requirements for activities that do not meet standards.
- Land use consents will be assessed in terms of their effects and the policies outlined above.
- In assessing resource consent applications the Council will have regard to relevant industry codes of practice/guidelines, e.g., The Code of Practice - Pig Farming, NZ Pork Industry Board, 2nd Edition, August 1993.
- Council will encourage land users to use Codes of Practice and other good practice guidelines.

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Other Statutory Plans

- The Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council will control discharge to air, land and water under the provisions of its regional plans.

[Standards expressed as Plan rules are considered to be the most appropriate and effective method of maintaining minimum standards for the matters over which the Council has jurisdiction; Rules provide certainty for resource users and for neighbours which is important for community understanding of what environmental quality is expected]

2.3 ANTICIPATED ENVIRONMENTAL RESULTS

The outcomes for the rural environment which are anticipated to result from the combined implementation of the above policies and methods are as follows:

- An adequate supply of highly versatile land (including Land Use Capability (LUC) Class 1 and 2) will continue to be available to meet the reasonably foreseeable food-production needs of future generations.
- Land management practices will gradually improve over time and the vulnerability of soils to erosion will be reduced.
- The low-density of settlement and the special rural landscape character will be maintained.